BOBS, A GIRL DETECTIVE

CAROL NORTON

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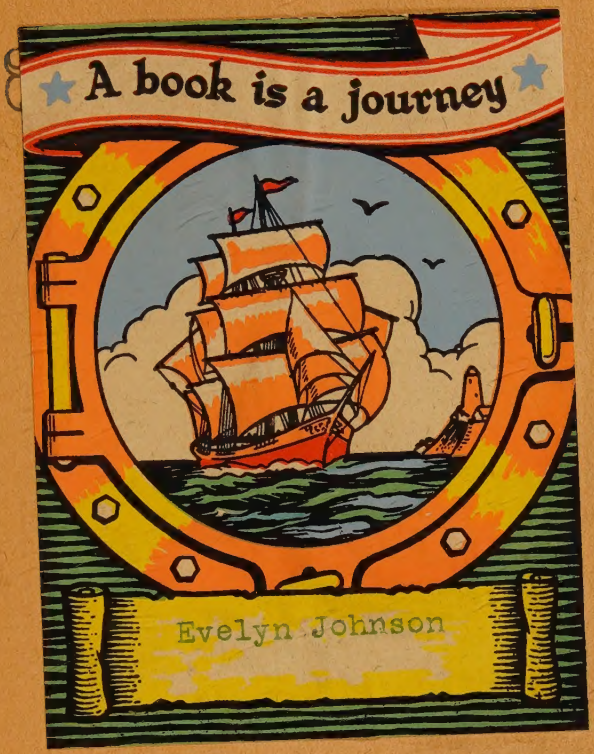

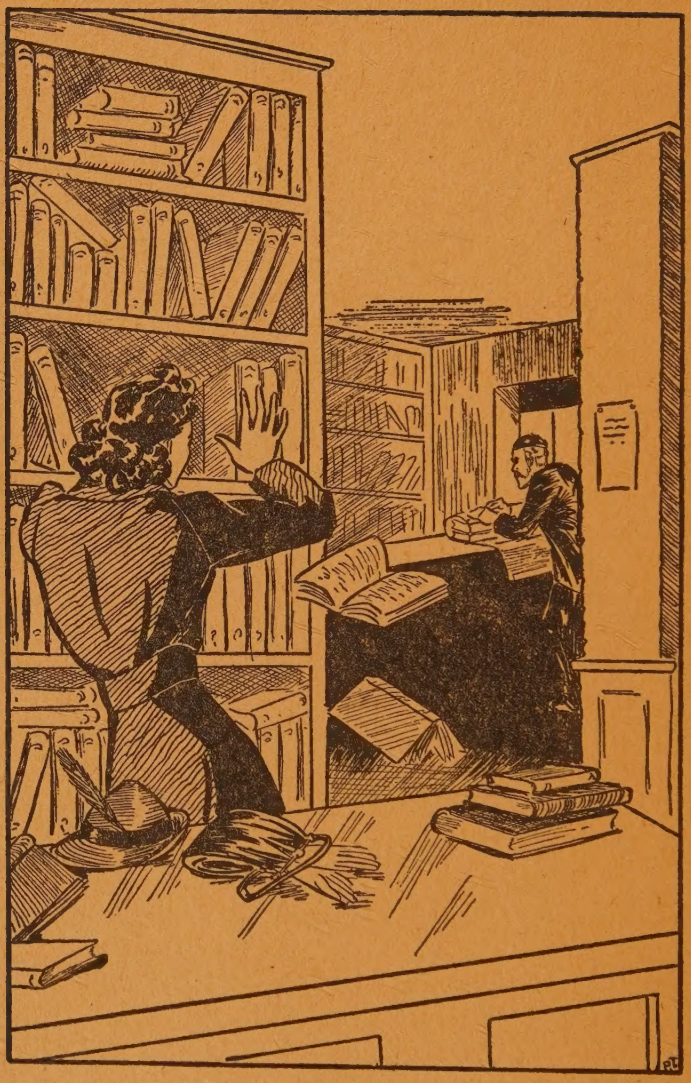

During his absence she went back of the counter.

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By CAROL NORTON

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CHAPTER I

FOUR GIRLS FACE A PROBLEM

"Now that the crash is over and the last echo has ceased to reverberate through our ancestral halls, the problem before the house is what shall the family of Vandergrifts do next?"

"Gloria, I do wish you wouldn't stand there grinning like a Cheshire cat. There certainly is nothing amusing about the whirlwind of a catastrophe that we have just been through and are still in, for that matter." Gwendolyn tapped her bronze-slippered toe impatiently as she sat in a luxuriously upholstered chair in what, until this past week, had been the library in the Long Island home of the proud family of Vandergrifts.

Gloria, the oldest of the four girls, ceased to smile but the pleasant expression, which was habitual to

the blue eyes, did not entirely vanish as she inquired, "What would you have me do, Gwen? Fret and fume as you are doing? That is no way to readjust your life to new and changed conditions. Face the facts squarely, say I, and then try to find some way to surmount your difficulties. Now first of all, we ought——"

The dark, handsome Gwendolyn, whose natural selfishness was plainly portrayed in a drooping mouth and petulant expression, put her fingers in her ears, saying: "If you are going to preach, I can assure you that I am not going to listen; so you might as well save your breath until——"

"Hush. Here comes Lena May in from the garden. Don't let her hear us scrapping. It effects her sensitive soul as discord effects a true musician."

Lena May entered through the porch door, her arms filled with blossoming branches.

"Look, sisters, aren't apple blossoms even sweeter than usual this year?" the slip of a girl began, then paused and glanced from one face to the other. "Gwen, what is wrong?" she asked anxiously.

But it was Gloria who replied, "Nothing at all, Pet. That is, nothing 'wronger' than usual, if you will permit my lapse of grammar."

But the dark-eyed sister threw down the book which she had been trying to read, as she exclaimed, "You both know perfectly well than nothing could be in more of a muddle than our lives are at the present moment and your 'look for the silver lining,' philosophy, Gloria Vandergrift, doesn't help *me* in the least."

The fawn-like eyes of the frail, youngest sister turned inquiringly toward the oldest. "Has anything more happened, I mean, anything new?" she asked.

"Yes, dear, we had a letter from Father's lawyer and he states than beyond a doubt our place here on Long Island does not belong to us and, for that matter, it never did really. Grandfather bought it in good faith, I am sure, but he did not receive a clear title."

"Then why doesn't our lawyer clear it up? That's what I'd like to know," Gwen said, throwing herself petulantly into another position. "Why did Father employ him, if he cannot attend to our legal matters?"

"But, Gwen, dear, can't you understand?" Gloria began to explain with infinite patience. "When Father died, leaving four orphaned daughters, we knew

that the fortune he had inherited had been lost through unwise investments, but we did think that the income from this vast acreage and the tenants would be sufficient to permit us to live in about the same comfortable way that we always have, but now we find that even this place is not ours and that we are—well, up against it, as Bobs would say."

"Where is Bobs?" This from Lena May, who was arranging the sprays of apple blossoms in a large pale-green bowl on a low wicker stand.

"Look out of yonder window and you will see the object of your inquiry," Gloria laughed as she pointed toward the park-like grounds where a hoidenish young girl of 17 could be seen riding astride a slender high-spirited black horse with a white star in his forehead.

"I do wish Roberta wouldn't wear that outlandish costume," Gwendolyn began, "and what's more I can't see why she wants to be galloping around the country in that fashion when a calamity like this is staring us in the face."

The horse had disappeared beyond the shrubbery. The sisters supposed that the young rider would go down to the stables and so they were somewhat

startled, a second later, by seeing Bobs vault over the sill of an open window and land in their midst.

Gwendolyn, of course, rebuked her. "Roberta Vandergrift, aren't you ever going to become ladylike?" she admonished.

The newcomer was about to retort that she hoped not if Gwen was a sample, but Gloria intervened. "Don't be ladylike, Bobs," she said. "Now, more than ever, we need a man in the family. But come, let's talk peaceably together and decide what we are to do."

"All right," Roberta tossed her hat to one side and sat tailor-wise on the floor, adding: "Fire ahead, I'm present."

"Such language," was what Gwendolyn refrained from saying, but Bobs chuckled in wicked glee. She thought it jolly fun to shock "Miss Prunes and Prisms," as she called the sister but one year her senior.

"Gloria, whatever you suggest, I know will be best," little Lena May said, as she slipped a trusting hand into that of the oldest sister. "Now, tell us, what is your plan?"

The oldest girl was thoughtful for a moment, then said: "Honestly, I don't know that I have

made one very far ahead, but of course we must leave here. That is the inevitable, and, equally of course, we must find some way of earning our daily bread."

"Bread, indeed," sniffed the disdainful Gwendolyn. "You know that I never eat such a plebian thing as bread."

"Well, you may work to earn cake if you prefer," Bobs told her, then leaning forward she added eagerly: "I say, Gloria, it's going to be a great adventure, isn't it? I've always been so envious of people who actually earned their own way in the world. It shows there is something in them. Anyone can be a parasite, but the person who is worth while isn't contented to be one. Ever since Kathryn De Laney went to little old New York town to take a course in nursing that she might do something big in the world, I've had the itch to do likewise. Getting up at noon and then dwaddling away the hours until midnight is all very well for those who like it, but not for mine! I've been wishing that something would jar us out of the rut we're in, and I, for one, am glad that it has come."

"Kathryn De Laney is a disgrace to her family." This, scornfully, from Gwen. "A girl with a mil-

lion in her own name could hire people to do all the nursing she wished done without going into dirty, slummy places herself, and actually waiting on immigrants, the very sight of whom would make me feel ill. I never even permit Hawkins to drive me through the poorer sections of the city and, if I am obliged to pass through the tenement district, I close the windows that I need not breath the polluted air; and I also draw the curtains."

"I've no doubt that you do," Bobs said, eyeing her sister almost coldly. "I sometimes wonder where our mother got you, anyway. You haven't one resemblance to that dear little woman who, when the squalid hamlet down by the sound was burned, opened her home and took them all in. We were too small to remember it ourselves, but I've heard Father tell about it time and again, and he would always end the story by saying, 'My dearest wish is that my four girls each grow up to be just such an angel woman as their mother was.' "

"Nor was that all," Lena May put in, a tender light glowing in her soft brown eyes. "Mother herself superintended the rebuilding of the hamlet which has now grown to be the model town along the sound." Then, looking lovingly up at the oldest

sister, she continued: "I'm glad, Gloria, that you are so like our mother. But you haven't as yet told me your plan and I am sure that you must at least have the beginning of one."

"Well, as I said before, we must leave here and go to work," Gloria replied. "I suppose the best thing would be for us to go to New York, where so many varieties of endeavor await us. Mr. Corey thinks that there will be about one hundred dollars a month for us to live on. That will be twenty-five dollars for each of us, and——"

"Twenty-five dollars, indeed? I can't even get a hat for that, and I certainly shall need one to wear to Phyllis De Laney's lawn party on the 18th of June if——"

"But you won't be here then, Gwen, so you might as well not plan to attend," Gloria said seriously. "We are obliged to vacate this place by the first of June. The Grabbersteins, who claim their ancestors were the original owners, will move in on that day, bag and baggage, and so my suggestion is that we leave the week previous, that we need not meet them."

"Have you thought what you will do to earn money?" Lena May asked Gloria.

"Yes. Miss Lovejoy of the East Seventy-seventh Street Settlement has asked me to take charge of the girls' clubs and I have accepted."

"Gloria Vandergrift; you, a daughter of one of the very oldest families in this country, to work, actually work in those dreadful smelling slums."

Gloria looked almost with pity at the speaker, who, of course, was Gwendolyn, as she said: "Do you realize that being born an aristocrat is merely an accident? You might have been born in the slums, Gwen, and if you had been, wouldn't you be glad to have someone come to you and give you a chance?"

There being no reply, Gloria continued: "I take no credit to myself because I happened to be born in luxury and not in poverty, but we'll have to postpone this conversation, for our neighbors are evidently coming to call."

Bobs sprang to her feet and leaped to the open window. "Hello there, Phyl and Dick! Come around this way and I'll open the porch door."

Gwendolyn shrugged her shoulders. "Why doesn't Roberta allow Peter to admit our visitors," she began, but Gloria interrupted: "One excellent reason, perhaps, is that all our servants except the cook left

this morning. You, of course, were still asleep and did not know of the exodus."

The sharp retort on the tongue of Gwendolyn was not uttered, for Phyllis De Laney and her big, good-looking brother, Richard, were entering the library.

"You poor dear girls! Just as soon as I heard the news I came right over," Phyllis De Laney exclaimed as she sank down in a deep, comfortable chair and looked about at her friends with an expression of frank curiosity on her doll-pretty face. "However, I told Ma Mere that I knew there wasn't a word of truth in the scandalous gossip, and so I came to hear how it all started that I may be able to contradict it." Phyllis took a breath and then continued her chatter: "Your maid, Gwen, told my Fanchon, and she said that every servant in your employ had been dismissed with two weeks' advance pay; and she said a good deal more than that too, which, of course, isn't true. Just listen to this and then tell me if it isn't simply scandalous. That maid declared that you girls are going to work, actually work, to earn your own living."

"I'll say it's true!" Roberta put in, grinning with wicked glee Her good pal, Dick, smiled over at her as he remarked with evident amusement: "You

don't look very miserable about it, Bobs. In fact, quite the contrary, you appear pleased. If the truth were known, I envy you, honestly I do! I'd much rather go to work than go to college. I'm no good at Latin or Greek. If languages are dead, bury them, I say. I'm not a student by nature, so what's the use pretending; but the pater won't hear to it. Just because our grandfather left us each a million, we've got to dwaddle away our lives spending it. Of course I'm nineteen now, but you wait until I'm twenty-one years old and see what will happen."

His sister Phyllis lifted her eyebrows ever so slightly and looked her disapproval. "In that time you will have changed your mind," she remarked. Then turning to her particular friend, she added: "But, Gwen, you aren't going to work, are you? Pray, what could you do?"

Gwendolyn was in no pleasant frame of mind as her sisters well knew, and her reply was most ungraciously given. Curtly she stated that she did not care to discuss her personal affairs with anyone.

Phyllis flushed and rose at once, saying coldly: "Indeed? Since when have you become so secretive? You always tell me everything you do and so I had no reason to suppose that you would object

to my friendly inquiry; but you need have no fear, I shall never again intrude upon your privacy. I will bid you all good afternoon and good-bye, for, of course, since you are going to New York to work, I suppose as clerks in the shops, we will not likely meet again."

"Aw, I say, Sis, cut it out! What's the big idea, anyway? A friend is a friend, isn't he, whether he wears broadcloth or overalls?" Then as his sister continued to sweep out of the room, the lad crossed to the oldest sister and held out his hand, saying, with sincere boyish sympathy, "Gloria, I'm mighty sorry about this—er—this—well, whatever it is, and please let me know where you go, and as soon as you're settled I'll run over and play the big brother act, if you'll let me."

Then, turning to Bobs, he said: "Go riding with me at sunrise tomorrow morning, will you, like we used to do before I went away to school. There's a lot I want to say, and the day after I'm going to be packed off to the academy again to be tortured for another month; then, thanks be, vacation will let me out of that prison for a while." Roberta hesitated, and Dick urged: "Go on, Bob! Be a sport. Say yes."

"All right. I'll be at the Twin Oaks, where we've met ever since we were little shavers."

When the door closed behind the departing guests Gloria turned to the sister, who was but one year her junior, and said: "Gwendolyn, I am sorry to say this, but the good of the larger number requires it. If you cannot face the changed conditions cheerfully with us, I shall have to ask you to make your plans independent of us. We three have decided to be brave and courageous, and try to find joy and happiness in whatever may present itself, just as our mother and father would wish us to do, and just as they would have done had similar circumstances overtaken them."

Gwendolyn rose and walked toward the door, but turned to say, "You need not concern yourselves about me in the least. I shall not go with you to New York. I shall visit my dear friend Eloise Rochester in Newport, as she has often begged me to do."

"An excellent plan, if——" Gloria began, then paused.

Gwendolyn turned and inquired haughtily, "If what?"

"If Eloise wants you when she hears that you

have neither home nor wealth. If I am anything of a character reader, I should say that the invitation about which you have just told was merely a bait, so to speak, for a return invitation. It is quite evident that Eloise has decided to marry Richard De Laney's million-dollar inheritance, and since Phyllis will not invite her to their home you, as a next-door neighbor, can be used to advantage."

"Indeed? Well, luckily Miss Vandergrift, you are *not* a character reader, as you will learn in the near future. You three make whatever plans you wish, but do not include me." So saying, Gwendolyn left the room and a few moments later the three sisters heard her moving about in the apartment overhead, and they correctly assumed that she was packing, preparatory for her departure to Newport.

Gloria sighed: "I wonder why Gwen is so unlike our mother and father?" she said.

"I have it," Bobs cried, whirling about with eyes laughingly aglow. "She's a changeling! A discontented nurse girl wished to wreak vengeance upon Mother for having discharged her, or something like that, and so she stole the child who really was our sister and left this——"

"Don't, Bobsie!" Lena May protested. "Even if

Gwen is selfish, maybe we are to blame. She was ill for so long after Mother died that we couldn't bear the thought of having two deaths, and so we rather spoiled her. I believe that if we meet her contrariness with love and are very patient we may find the gold that must be in her nature, since she *is* our mother's child."

"You can do it, if it's do-able, Lena May," Bobs declared. "Now, Gloria, break the glad news! When do we hit the trail for the big town?"

"I'm going in tomorrow to find a place for us to live. If you girls wish, you may accompany me."

"Wish? Why, all the king's oxen and all the king's men couldn't keep me from going."

Gloria smiled at her hoidenish sister but refrained from commenting on her language. She was so thankful that there was only one Gwen in the family that she could overlook lesser failings. Bobs was taking the mishap that had befallen them as a great adventure, but even she did not dream of the truly exciting adventures that lay before them.

CHAPTER II.

A PROPOSAL

Soon after daybreak the next morning, down a deserted country road, two thoroughbred horses were galloping neck and neck.

"Gee along, Star," Bobs was shouting. She had lost her hat a mile back and her short hair, which would ripple, though she tried hard to brush out the natural curls, was tossed about her head, making her look more hoidenish than ever.

Dick, on his slender brown horse, gradually won a lead and was a length ahead when they reached the Twin Oaks, which for many years had been their trysting place. Roberta and Dick had been playmates and then pals, squabbling and making up, ever since the pinafore days, more, however, like two boys than a boy and a girl. Bobs, in fact, never thought of herself as a young person who in due time would become a marriageable young lady, and

so it was with rather a shock of surprise that she heard Dick say, when they had drawn their horses to a standstill in the shade of the wide-spreading trees: "I say, Roberta, couldn't you cut out this going to work stuff and marry me?"

"Ye gods and little fishes! *Me* marry you?" Bobs' remark and the accompanying expression in her round, sunburned face, with its pertly tilting freckled nose, were none too complimentary.

Dick flushed. "Well, I say! What's the matter with me, anyhow? Anyone might think, by the way you're staring, that I had said something dreadful. I'm not deformed, am I? And I've got money enough so you wouldn't have to work ever and——"

Roberta became a girl at once, a girl with a sincere nature and a tender heart. Reaching out a strong brown hand, she placed it kindly on the arm of her friend. "Dicky, boy, forgive me, if—if I was a little astonished and showed it. Truth is, for so many years I've thought of you as the playmate I could always count on to fight my battles, that I'd sort of forgotten that we were grown up enough to even think of marrying. Of course we aren't grown up enough yet to really marry, for you are only nineteen, and I'm worse than that, being not yet

seventeen. And as for money, Dick, I'd like you heaps better if you were poor and working your way, but I know that you meant what you said most kindly. You wanted to save me from hard knocks, but, Dick, honest Injun, I revel in them. That is, I suppose I will. Never having had one as yet, I can't speak from past experience."

Then they rode slowly back to find the hat that had blown off into the bushes. Dick rescued it, and when he returned it he handed her a spray from a blossoming wild rose vine.

The lad did not again refer to his offer, and the girl, he noted with an inward sigh, had evidently forgotten all about it. She was gazing about her appreciatively. "Dicky boy," she exclaimed, "there's nothing much prettier than early morning in the country, is there, with the dew still sparkling—and a meadow lark singing," she added, for at that moment a joyous song arose from a near-by thicket.

For a time they were silent as they rode slowly back by the way they had come. Then Dick said, "Bobs, since you love the country so dearly, aren't you afraid you'll be homesick in that human whirlpool, New York?"

The girl turned toward him brightly. "Perhaps,

sometimes," she replied. "But it isn't far to the country when I feel the need of a deep breath of fresh air." Then her face saddened as she continued: "Of course we won't be coming out here any more." She waved toward the vast estate which for many years had been the home of Vandergrifts. "We couldn't stand it, not one of us could, to see strangers living where Mother and Father were so happy. They'll probably change things a lot." Then she added almost passionately: "I hope they will. Then, if ever I *do* see it again, it will not look like the same place."

Dick did not say what was in his heart, but gloomily he realized that if the girl at his side did not expect ever to return to that neighborhood, it was quite evident that she would not be his wife, for his home adjoined that of the Vandergrifts.

When he spoke, his words in no way betrayed his thoughts. "Have you any idea, Bobs, what you'd like to do, over there in the big city; I mean to make a living?"

The girl laughed; then sent a merry side glance toward her companion. "You never could guess in a thousand years," she flung at him, then challenged: "Try!"

The boy flicked his quirt at the drooping branches of a willow they were passing, then frankly confessed that he couldn't picture Roberta in any of the occupations for women of which he had ever heard. Mischievously she queried, "Wouldn't I make a nice demure saleswoman for ladies' dresses or——"

"Great guns, *No!*" was the explosive interruption. "Don't put such a strain on my imagination." Then he laughed gaily, for he was evidently trying to picture the hoidenish girl mincing up and down in some fashionable emporium dressed in the latest styles, while women peered at her through lorgnettes. Bobs laughed with him when he told his thoughts, then said:

"I'll agree, as a model, I won't do." Then with pretended thoughtfulness she flicked a fly from her horse's ear. "Would I make a good actress, Dicky, do you think?"

"You'd make a better circus performer," the boy told her. "I'll never forget the antics we used to pull, before——"

"Before I realized that I was a girl and *had* to be ladylike." Bobs laughed with him, then added merrily, "If it hadn't been for my prunes and prisms,

Sister Gwendolyn, I might *never* have ceased to be a tom-boy."

"I hope you never will become like Gwen," Dick said almost fiercely, "or like my sister Phyllis, either. They're not *our kind*, though I'm sorry to say it." Then noting a far-away, thoughtful expression which had crept into the girl's eyes, the lad inquired: "Say, Bobs, have you any idea *how* Gwyn *can* earn a living? You're the sort who can hold your own anywhere. You'd be willing to work, but Gwyn—well, I can't picture her as a daily-bread earner."

His companion shook her head; then quite unexpectedly she said: "Dick, why *didn't* you fall in love with Gwen? It would have solved her problem to have had someone nice and rich to take care of her."

"Well, of all the unheard of preposterous suggestions!" The amazed youth was so astonished that he unconsciously drew rein and stared at the girl. He knew by her merry laugh that she had said it but to tease, and so he rode on again at her side. Bobs feared that she had hurt her friend, for his face was still flushed and he did not speak. Reining her horse close to his, she again put a hand on his arm, saying with sincere earnestness: "Forgive me,

pal of mine, if I seemed to speak lightly. Honestly, I didn't mean it—that is, not as it sounded. But I *do* wish that someone as nice and—yes, I'll say as rich as you are, *would* propose to poor Gwen. You don't know how sorry Gloria and I feel because Gwen has to be poor with the rest of us." The boy had placed his hand over the one resting on his arm, but only for a moment. "You see," Bobs explained, "Glow and I honestly feel that an adventure of a new and interesting kind awaits us, and, as for little Lena May, money means nothing to her. If she can just be with Gloria, that is all she asks of Fate."

They had reached the Vandergrift gate and Bobs, drawing rein, reached out her hand, saying: "Good-bye, Dick." Then, after a hesitating moment, she added sincerely, "I'm sorry, old pal. I wish I could have said yes—that is, if it means a lot to you."

The boy held her hand in a firm clasp as he replied earnestly, "I'm not going to give up hoping, Bobsie. I'll put that question on the table for a couple of years, but, when I am twenty-one, I'm going to hit the trail for *wherever* you are, and ask it all over again. You see if I don't."

"You won't if Eloise Rochester has anything to say about it," was the girl's merry rejoinder. Then

as Bobs turned her horse toward the stables, she called over her shoulder: "O, I say, Dick, I forgot to tell you the profession I've chosen. I'm going to be a girl detective."

CHAPTER III.

VENTURING FORTH

When Roberta entered the breakfast room, she found Gloria and Lena May there waiting for her. In answer to her question, the oldest sister replied that Gwen would not unlock her door. Lena May had left her breakfast on a tray in the hall. "We think she is packing to leave," Gloria sighed. "The way Gwen takes our misfortune is the hardest thing about it."

Bobs, who was ravenously hungry after her early morning ride, was eating her breakfast with a relish which contrasted noticeably with the evident lack of appetite shown by her sisters. At last she said: "Glow, I'm not so sure all this is really a misfortune. If something hadn't happened to jolt us out of a rut, we would have settled down here and led a humdrum, monotonous life, going to teas and receptions,

bridge parties and week-ends, played tennis and golf, married and died, and nothing real or vital would have happened. But, now, take it from me, I, for one, am going to really live, not stagnate or rust."

Gloria smiled as she hastened to assure her sister: "I agree with you, Bobs. I'm glad something *has* happened to make it possible for me to carry out a long-cherished desire of mine. I haven't said much about it, but ever since Kathryn De Laney came home last summer on a vacation and told me about the girls of the East Side who have never had a real chance to develop the best that is in them, I have wanted to help them. I didn't know how to go about doing it, not until the crash came. Then I wrote Kathryn, and you know what happened next. She found a place for me in the Settlement House to conduct social clubs for those very girls of whom she had told me."

Both of the listeners noted the eager, earnest expression on the truly beautiful face of the sister who had mothered them, but almost at once it had saddened, and they knew that again she was thinking of Gwen. Directly after breakfast Gloria went once more to the upper hall and tapped on a closed and locked door, but there was no response from

within. However, the breakfast tray which Lena May had left on a near table was not in sight, and so, at least, Gwendolyn was not going hungry.

It seemed strange to the two younger girls to be clearing away the breakfast things and tidying up the kitchen where, for so many years, a good-natured Chinaman had reigned supreme.

"I'm going to miss Sing more than any servant that we ever had," Bobs was saying when Gloria entered the kitchen. There was a serious expression on the face of the oldest girl and Bobs refrained from uttering the flippancy which had been on the tipe of her tongue. Lena May, having put away the dishes, turned to ask solicitously: "Wouldn't Gwen let you in, Glow?"

"No, I didn't hear a sound, but the tray is gone." The gentle Lena May was pleased to hear that.

"Poor Gwen, she is making it harder for herself and for all of us," Gloria said; then added, "Are you girls ready to go with me? I'd like to get over to the city early, after the first rush is over and the midday rush has not begun."

Exultant Bobs could not refrain from waving the dishcloth she still held. "Hurray for us!" she sang out. "Three adventurers starting on they know not

what wild escapade. Wait until I change my togs, Glow, and I'll be with you." Then, glancing down at her riding habit, "Unless this will do?" she questioned her sister.

"Of course not, dear. We'll all wear tailored suits."

It was midmorning when three fashionably attired girls for the first time in their lives ascended to the Third Avenue Elevated, going uptown. At that hour there were few people traveling in that direction and they had a car almost to themselves. As they were whirled past tenements, so close that they could plainly see the shabby furniture in the flats beyond, the younger girls suddenly realized how great was the contrast between the life that was ahead of them and that which they were leaving. The thundering of the trains, the constant rumble of traffic below, the discordant cries of hucksters, reached them through the open windows. "It's hard to believe that a meadow lark is singing anywhere in the world," Bobs said, turning to Gloria. "Or that little children are playing in those meadows," the older girl replied. She was watching the pale, ragged children hanging to railings around fire escapes on a level with the train windows.

"Poor little things!" Lena May's tone was pitying, "I don't see how they can do much playing in such cramped, crowded places."

"I don't suppose they even know the meaning of the word," Bobs replied.

They left the train at the station nearest the Seventy-seventh Street Settlement. Since Gloria was to be employed there, she planned starting from that point to search for the nearest suitable dwelling. They found themselves in a motley crowd composed of foreign women and children, who jostled one another in an evident effort to reach the sidewalk where, in two-wheeled carts, venders of all kinds of things salable were calling their wares. "They must sell everything from fish to calico," Bobs reported after a moment's inspection from the curbing.

The women, who wore shawls of many colors over their heads and who carried market baskets and babies, were, some of them, Bohemians and others Hungarian. Few words of English were heard by the interested girls. "I see where I have to acquire a new tongue if I am to know what our future neighbors are talking about," Bobs had just said, when, suddenly, just ahead of them, a thin, sickly woman slipped and would have fallen had not a

laboring man who was passing caught her just in time. The grateful woman coughed, her hand pressed to her throat, before she could thank him. The girls saw that she had potatoes in a basket which seemed too heavy for her. The man was apparently asking where she lived; then he assisted her toward a near tenement.

"Well," Bobs exclaimed, "there is evidently chivalry among working men as well as among idlers."

At the crossing they were caught in a jam of traffic and pedestrians. Little Lena May clung to Gloria's arm, looking about as though terrorized at this new and startling experience. When, after some moments' delay, the opposite sidewalk was reached in safety, Bobs exclaimed gleefully: "Wasn't that great?" But Lena May had not enjoyed the experience, and it was quite evident to the other two that it was going to be very hard for their sensitive, frail youngest sister to be transplanted from her gardens, where she had spent long, quiet, happy hours, painting the scenes she loved, to this maelstrom of foreign humanity. There was almost a pang of regret in the heart of the girl who had mothered the others when she realized fully, for the first time, what her own choice of a home location might mean to their

youngest Perhaps she had been selfish, because of her own great interest in Settlement Work, to plan to have them all live on the crowded East Side, but her fears were set at rest a moment later when they came upon a group of children, scarcely more than babies, who were playing in a gutter. Lena May's sweet face brightened and, smiling up at Gloria, she exclaimed: "Aren't they dears, in spite of the rags and dirt? I'd love to do something for them."

"I'd like to put them all in a tub of soap-suds and give them a good scrubbing for once in their lives," the practical Bobs remarked. Then she caught Gloria by the arm, exclaiming, as she nodded toward a crossing, "There goes that chivalrous laboring man. He steps off with too much agility to be a ditch-digger, or anyone who does hard work, doesn't he, Glow?"

The oldest sister laughed. "Bobs," she remarked, "I sometimes think that you are a detective by nature. You are always trying to discover by the cut of a man's hair what his profession may be."

Bobs' hazel eyes were merry, though her face was serious. "You've hit it, Glow!" she exclaimed. "I was going to keep it a secret a while longer, but I

might as well confess, now that the cat is out of the bag."

"What cat?" Lena May had only heard half of this sentence; she had been so interested in watching the excitement among the children caused by the approach of an organ grinder.

"My chosen profession is the cat," Bobs informed her, "and I suppose my brain, where it has been hiding, is the bag. I'm going to be a detective."

Little Lena May was horrified. Detectives meant to her sleuths who visited underground haunts of crooks of all kinds. "I'm sure Gloria will not wish it, will you, Glow?"

Appealingly the soft brown eyes were lifted and met the smiling gaze of the oldest sister. "We are each to do the work for which we are best fitted," she replied. "You are to be our little housekeeper and that will give you time to go on with your painting. I was just wondering a moment ago if you might not like to put some of these black-eyed Hungarian babies into a picture. If they are clean, they would be unusually beautiful."

Lena May was interested at once and glanced about for possible subjects, and so for the time being the startling statement of Bobs' chosen profession

was dropped. They were nearing the East River, very close to which stood a large, plain brick building containing many windows. "I believe that is the Settlement House," Gloria had just said, when Bobs, discovering the name over the door, verified the statement.

A pretty Hungarian girl of about their own age answered their ring and admitted them to a big cheerful clubroom. Another girl was practicing on a piano in a far corner. The three newcomers seated themselves near the door and looked about with great interest. Just beyond were shelves of books. Bobs sauntered over to look at the titles. "It's a dandy collection for girls," she reported as she again took her seat.

It was not long before Miss Lovejoy, the matron entered the room and advanced toward them. The three girls rose to greet her.

Miss Lovejoy smilingly held out a hand to the tallest, saying in her pleasant, friendly voice, "I wonder if I am right in believing that *you* are the Miss Gloria Vandergrift who is coming to assist me."

"Yes, Miss Lovejoy, I am, and these are my younger sisters, Roberta and little Lena May." Then she explained: "We haven't moved into town as yet.

I thought best to come over this morning and find a place for us to live; then we will have our trunks sent and our personal possessions."

"That is a good idea," the matron said, then asked: "Have you found anything as yet?"

"We thought, since we are strangers in the neighborhood, that you might be able to suggest some place for us," Gloria told the matron.

After a thoughtful moment Miss Lovejoy replied: "The tenement houses in this immediate neighborhood are most certainly not desirable for one used to comforts. However, on Seventy-eighth Street, there is a new model tenement built by some wealthy women and it is just possible that there may be a vacant flat. You might inquire at the office there. You can take the short-cut path across the playground and it will lead you directly to the model tenement."

"Thank you, Miss Lovejoy," Gloria said. "We will let you know the result of our search."

CHAPTER IV.

A HAUNTED HOUSE

THE model tenement which Miss Lovejoy had pointed out to them was soon reached. A door on the ground floor was labeled "Office," and so Gloria pushed the electric button.

A trim young woman whose long-lashed, dark eyes suggested her nationality, received them, but regretted to have to tell them that every flat in the model tenement was occupied. She looked, with but slightly concealed curiosity, at these three applicants who, as was quite evident, were from other environments.

Gloria glanced about the neat courtyard and up at windows where flowers were blossoming in bright window boxes, then glowingly she turned back to the girl: "It was a splendid thing for those wealthy society women to do, wasn't it," she said, "erecting this really handsome yellow brick building in the

midst of so much poverty and squalor. It must have a most uplifting effect on the lives of the poor people to be able to live here where everything is so sweet and clean, rather than there," nodding, as she spoke, at a building across the street which looked gloomy, crumbling, unsafe and unsanitary.

The office attendant spoke with enthusiasm. "No one knows better than I, for I used to live in the other kind of tenement when I was a child, but Miss Lovejoy's club for factory girls gave me my chance to learn bookkeeping, and now I am agent here. My name is Miss Selenski. Would you like to see the model apartment?"

"Thank you. Indeed we would," Gloria replied with enthusiasm; then she added, "Miss Selenski, I am Miss Vandergrift, and these are my sisters, Roberta and Lena May. We hope to be your neighbors soon."

If there was a natural curiosity in the heart of the dark-eyed girl, she said nothing of it, and at once led the way through the neatly tiled halls and soon opened a door admitting them to a small flat of three rooms, which was clean and attractively furnished. The windows, flooded with sunlight, overlooked the East River.

"This is the apartment that we show," Miss Solenski explained. "The others are just like it, or were, before tenants moved in," she corrected.

"Say, this *is* sure cosy! Who lives in this one?" Bobs inquired.

"I do," Miss Selenski replied, hurrying to add, "But I did not fit it up. The ladies did that. It has all the modern appliances that help to make housekeeping easy, and once every week a teacher comes here to instruct the neighborhood women how to cook, clean and sew; in fact, how to live. And the lessons and demonstrations are given in this apartment."

When the girls were again in the office, Gloria turned to their new acquaintance, saying, "Do you happen to know of any place around here that is vacant where we might like to live?"

At first Miss Selenski shook her head. Then she added, with a queer little smile, "Not unless you're willing to live in the old Pensinger mansion."

Then she went on to explain: "Long, long ago, when New York was little more than a village, and Seventy-eighth Street was country, all along the East River there were, here and there, handsome mansion-like homes and vast grounds. Oh, so different from

what it is now! Every once in a while you find one of these old dwellings still standing.

"Some of them house many poor families, but the Pensinger mansion is seldom occupied. If a family is brave enough to move in, before many weeks the 'for rent' sign is again at the door. The rent is almost nothing, but—" the girl hesitated, then went on to say, "Maybe I ought not to tell you the story about the old place if you have any thought of living there."

"Oh, please tell it! Is it a ghost story?" Bobs begged, and Gloria added, "Yes, do tell it, Miss Selenski. We are none of us afraid of ghosts."

"Of course you aren't," Miss Selenski agreed, "and, for that matter, neither am I. But nearly all of our neighbors are superstitious. Mr. Tenowitz, the grocer at the corner of First and Seventy-ninth has the renting of the place, and he declares that the last tenant rushed into his store early one morning, paid his bill and departed without a word of explanation, but he looked, Mr. Tenowitz told me, as though he *had* seen a ghost. I don't think there is anything the matter with the old house," their informant continued, "except just loneliness.

"Of course, big, barnlike rooms, when they are

empty, echo every sound in a mournful manner without supernatural aid."

"But how did it all start?" Bobs inquired. "Did anything of an unusual nature ever happen there?"

Miss Selenski nodded, and then continued: "The story is that the only daughter of the last of the Pensingers who lived there disappeared one night and was never again seen. Her mother, so the tale goes, wished her to marry an elderly English nobleman, but she loved a poor Hungarian violinist whom she was forbidden to see. Because of her grief, she did many strange things, and one of them was to walk at midnight, dressed all in white, along the brink of the dark swirling river which edged the wide lawn in front of her home. Her white silk shawl was found on the bank one morning and the lovely Marilyn Pensinger was never seen again.

"Her father, however, was convinced that his daughter was not drowned, but that she had married the man she loved and returned with him to his native land, Hungary. So great was his faith in his own theory that, in his will, he stated that the taxes on the old Pensinger mansion should be paid for one hundred years and that it should become the prop-

erty of any descendant of his daughter, Marilyn, who could be found within that time.

"I believe that will was made about seventy-five years ago and so, you see, there are twenty-five years remaining for an heir to turn up."

"What will happen if no one claims the old place?" Gloria inquired.

"It is to be sold and the money devoted to charity," Miss Selenski told them.

"That certainly is an interesting yarn," Bobs declared; then added gleefully, I suppose the people around here think that the fair Marilyn returns at midnight, prowling along the shores of the river looking for her white silk shawl."

Miss Selenski nodded. "That's about it, I believe." Then she added brightly, "I'll tell you what, I'm not busy at this hour and if you wish I'll take you over to see the old place. Mr. Tenowitz will give me the keys."

"Thank you, Miss Selenski," Gloria said. "We would be glad to have you show us the place. There seems to be nothing else around here to rent and we might remain in the Pensinger mansion until you have a model flat unoccupied."

"That will not be soon," they were told, "as there is a long waiting list."

Then, after hanging a sign on the door which stated that she would be gone for half an hour, Miss Selenski and the three interested young people went down Seventy-eighth Street and toward the East River.

Bobs was hilariously excited. Perhaps, after all, she was going to have an opportunity to really practice what she had, half in fun, called her chosen profession, for was there not a mystery to be solved and an heir to be found?

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE NEW HOME

LENA MAY'S clasp on the hand of her older sister grew unconsciously tighter as they passed a noisy tobacco factory which faced the East River and loomed, smoke-blackened and huge.

The old Pensinger mansion was just beyond, set far back on what had once been a beautiful lawn, reaching to the river's edge, but which was now hard ground with here and there a half-dead tree struggling to live without care. A wide road now separated it from the river, which was lined as far up and down as one could see with wharves, to which coal and lumber barges were tied.

The house did indeed look as though it were a century old. The windows had never been boarded up, and many of the panes had been broken by stones

thrown by the most daring of the street urchins, though, luckily, few dared go near enough to further molest the place for fear of stirring up the "haunt."

"A noble house gone to decay," Gloria said. She had to speak louder than usual because of the pounding and whirring of the machinery in the neighboring factory. Lena May wondered if anywhere in all the world there were still peaceful spaces where birds sang, or where the only sound was the murmuring of the wind in the trees.

"Is it never still here?" she turned big inquiring eyes toward their guide.

"Never," Miss Selenski told her. "That is, not for more than a minute at a time, between shifts, for when the day work stops the night work begins."

"Many of the workers are women, are they not?" Gloria was looking at the windows of the factory where many foreign women could be seen standing at long tables.

"They leave their children at the Settlement House. They work on the day shift, and the men, if they can be made to work at all, go on at night."

"Oh, Gloria!" this appealingly from the youngest, "will we ever be able to sleep in the midst of such noise, when we have been used to such silent nights at home?"

"I don't much wonder that you ask," Bobs laughingly exclaimed, as she thrust her fingers in her ears, for at that moment a tug on the river, not a stone's throw away from them, rent the air with a shrill blast of its whistle, which was repeated time and again.

"You won't mind the noises when you get used to them," Miss Selenski told them cheerfully. "I lived on Seventy-sixth Street, right under the Third Avenue L, and the only time I woke up was when the trains stopped running. The sudden stillness startles one, I suppose."

Lena May said nothing, but she was remembering what Bobs had said when they had left the Third Avenue Elevated: "Now we are to see how the 'other half' lives."

"Poor other half!" the young girl thought. "I ought to be willing to live here for a time and bring a little of the brightness I have known into their lives, for they must be very drab."

"Just wait here a minute," Miss Selenski was saying, "and I'll run over to the grocery and get the key."

She was back in an incredibly short time and found the three girls examining with great interest the heavy front door, which had wide panels, a shapely fan light over them, with beautiful emerald glass panes on each side.

"I simply adore this knocker," Bobs declared, jubilantly. "Hark, let's hear the echoes."

The knocker was lifted and dropped again, but though they all listened intently, a sudden confusion on the river made it impossible to hear aught else.

"My private opinion is that Marilyn's ghost would much prefer some other spot for midnight prowls," Bobs remarked, as the old key was being fitted into the queerly designed lock. "Imagine a beautiful, sensitive girl of seventy-five years ago trying to prowl down there where barges are tied to soot-black docks and where derricks are emptying coal into waiting trucks. No really romantic ghost, such as I am sure Marilyn Pensinger must be, would care to prowl around here."

Miss Selenski smiled at Bobs' nonsense. "I'm

glad you feel that way," she said, "for, of course, if you don't believe in the ghost, you won't mind renting the house."

At that moment the derrick of which Bobs had spoken emptied a great bucket of coal with a deafening roar, and a wind blowing from the river sent the cloud of black dust hurling toward them.

"Quick! Duck inside!" Bobs cautioned, as they all leaped within and closed the door with a bang.

"Jimminy-crickets!" she then ejaculated, using her favorite tom-boy expression. "The man who has this place to rent can't advertise it as clean and quiet, a good place for nervous people to recuperate." Then with a wry face toward her older sister, "I can't imagine Gwen in this house, can you?"

There was a sudden troubled expression in Gloria's eyes. "No, dear, I can't. And I'm wondering, in fact I have often been wondering this morning, if we ought not to select some place where Gwen and little Lena May would be happier, for, of course, Gwen *can't* keep on visiting her friends forever. She will have to come home some day." The speaker felt a hand slip into hers and, glancing down, she saw a pleading in the uplifted eyes of

their youngest. "I'd *like* to live here, Glow, for a while, if you would."

"Little self-sacrificing puss that you are." Gloria smiled at Miss Selenski, then said: "May we look over the old house and decide if we wish to take it? Time is passing and we have much packing to do if we are to return in another day or two."

Although she did not say so, Bobs and Lena May knew that their mothering sister was eager to return to their Long Island home that she might see Gwendolyn before her departure.

The old colonial mansion, like many others of its kind, had a wide hall extending from the front to the back. At the extreme rear was a fireplace with built-in seats. In fact, to the great delight of Bobs, who quite adored them, a fireplace was found in each of the big barren rooms. Four of these were on that floor, with the old kitchen in the basement, and four vast silent rooms above, that had been bed chambers in the long ago. Too, there was an attic, which they did not visit.

When they had returned to the front hall, Bobs exclaimed: "We might rent just one floor of this mansion and then have room to spare."

But the oldest sister looked dubious. "I hardly

think it advisable to attempt to live in this place—" she began. "There is enough room here to home an orphanage, and the kiddies wouldn't be crowded, either."

Roberta was plainly disappointed. "Oh, I say, Glow, haven't you always told us younger girls not to make hasty conclusions, and here you have hardly more than crossed the threshold and you have decided that we couldn't make the old house livable. Now, I think this room could be made real cozy."

How the others laughed. "Bobs, what a word to apply to this old high-ceiled salon with its huge chandeliers and——"

"Say, girls," the irrepressible interrupted, wouldn't you like to see all of those crystals sparkle when the room is lighted?" Then she confessed, "Perhaps cozy isn't exactly the right word, but nevertheless I like the place, and now, with the door closed, it isn't so noisy either. It's keen, take it from me."

"Roberta," Gloria sighed, "now and then I congratulate myself that you have actually reformed in your manner of speech, when——"

"Say, Glow, I'll make a bargain," Bobs again interrupted. "I'll talk like the daughter of Old-dry-

as-dust-Johnson, if you'll take this place. Now, my idea is that we can just furnish up this lower floor. Make one of the back rooms into a kitchen and dining-room, put in gas and electricity, and presto change, there you are living in a modern up-to-date apartment. Then we could lock up the basement and the rooms upstairs and forget they are there."

"If you are permitted to forget," Miss Selenski added, with her pleasant smile. Then, for the first time, the girls remembered that the old house was supposed to be supernaturally occupied.

It was Bobs who exclaimed: "Well, if that poor girl, Marilyn Pensinger, wants to come back here now and then and prowl about her very own ancestral mansion, I, for one, think we would be greatly lacking in hospitality if we didn't make her welcome."

Then pleadingly to her older sister: "Glow, be a sport! Take it for a month and give it a try-out."

Lena May's big brown eyes wonderingly watched this enthusiastic sister, who was but one year her senior, but whose tastes were widely different. Her gentle heart was already desperately homesick for the old place on Long Island, for the gardens that were a riot of flowers from spring until late fall

Gloria walked to one of the windows and looked out meditatively. "If this is the only place in the neighborhood in which we can live," she was thinking, "perhaps we would better take it, and, after all, Bobs may be right: this one floor can be made real homelike with the furniture that we will bring, and what we do not need can be stored in the rooms overhead."

Bobs was eagerly awaiting her older sister's decision, and when it was given, that hoidenish girl leaped about the room, staging a sort of wild Indian dance that must have amazed the two chandeliers which had in the long ago looked down upon dignified young ladies who solemnly danced the minuet, and yet, perhaps the lonely old house was glad and proud to think that it had been chosen as a residence for three girls, and that once again its walls would reverberate with laughter and song.

"We must start for home at once," Gloria said. Then, to Miss Selenski, "We will stop on our way to the elevated and tell Mr. Tenowitz that we will take the place for a time; and thank you so much for having helped us find something. We shall want you to come often to see us."

Bobs was the last one to leave, and before she closed the heavy old-fashioned door, she peered back into the musty dimness and called, "Good-bye, old house, we're going to have jolly good times, all of us together."

CHAPTER VI.

A LOST SISTER

Two weeks later many changes had taken place. Mr. Tenowitz had agreed to have one of the two large back rooms transformed into a modern kitchen at one end, and the other end arranged so that it might be used as a dining-room. In that room the early morning sun found its way, and when Lena May had filled the windows with boxes containing the flowering plants brought from the home gardens, it assumed a cheerfulness that delighted the heart of the little housekeeper.

Too, the huge chandeliers in the salon had been wired with electricity, and great was the joy in the heart of Bobs on the night when they were first lighted. The rich furnishings from their own drawing-room were in place and the effect was far more homelike than Gloria had supposed possible.

The two large rooms on the other side of the

wide dividing hall had been fitted up as bed chambers and the furniture that they did not need had been stored in the large room over the kitchen.

How Lena May had dreaded that first night they had spent in the old house, not because she believed it to be haunted. Gloria had convinced her that that could not possibly be so, but because of the unusual noises, she knew that she would not be able to sleep a wink. Nor was she, for each time that she fell into a light slumber, a shriek from some passing tug awakened her, and a dozen times at least she seized her roommate, exclaiming, "Glow, what was that?" Sometimes it was a band of hoodlums passing, or again an early milk wagon, or some of the many noises which accompanied the night activities of the factory that was their next-door neighbor.

It was a very pale, sleepy-eyed Lena May who set about getting breakfast the next morning, with Gloria helping, but Bobs looked as refreshed as though she had spent the night in her own room on Long Island, where the whippoorwill was the only disturber of the peace.

"You'll get used to it soon," that beaming maiden told Lena May, and then, when the youngest girl had gone with a small watering pot to attend to the

needs of her flower gardens at the front of the house, Bobs added softly: "Glow, how have you planned things? It never would do to leave Lena May all alone in the house, would it? And yet you and I must go out and earn our daily bread."

"I shall take Lena May with me wherever I go; that is, I will at first, until we have things adjusted," the older sister replied. Then she inquired: "What do you intend to do, Bobsie, or is it a secret as yet?"

"It sure is," was the laughing reply, "a secret from myself, as well as from everyone else, but I'm going to start out all alone into the great city of New York this morning and give it the once over."

"Roberta Vandergrift, didn't you promise me that you would talk like a Johnsonian if we would rent this house?" Gloria reprimanded.

The irrepressible younger girl's eyes twinkled. "My revered sister," she said, solemnly, "my plans for the day are as yet veiled in mystery, but, with your kind permission, I will endeavor to discover in this vast metropolis some refined occupation, the doing of which will prove sufficiently remunerative to enable me to at least assist in the recuperation of our fallen fortunes." Then rising and making a deep bow, her right hand on her heart, that mis-

chievous girl inquired: "Miss Vandergrift, shall I continue conversing in that way during our sojourn in this ancient mansion, or shall I be—just natural?"

Lena May, who had returned, joined in the laughter, and begged, "Do be natural, Bobs, please, but not too natural."

"Thank you, mademoiselles, for your kind permission, and now I believe I will don my outdoor apparel and go in search of a profession."

Gloria looked anxiously at the young girl before her, who was of such a splendid athletic physique, whose cheeks were ruddy with health, and whose eyes were glowing with enthusiasm. Ought she to permit Bobs to go alone into the great surging mass of humanity so unprotected?

"Roberta," she began, "do not be too trusting, dear. Remember that the city is full of dangers that lurk in out-of-the-way places."

The younger girl put both hands on the shoulders of the oldest sister and, looking steadily into her eyes, she said seriously: "Glow, dear, you have taught us that the greatest thing a parent can do for her daughter is to teach her to be self-reliant that she may stand alone as, sooner or later, she will have to do. I shall be careful, as I do not wish to

cause my sisters needless worry or anxiety, but I *must* begin to live my own life. You really wish me to do this, do you not, Gloria?"

"Yes, dear," was the reply, "and I am sure the love of our mother will guide and guard you. Good-bye and good luck."

When Bobs was gone, Lena May slipped up to the older sister, who had remained seated, and, putting a loving arm over the strong shoulders, she said tenderly: "Glow, there are tears in your eyes. Why? Do you mind Bobs' going alone out into the world?"

"I was thinking of Mother, dear, and wishing I could better take her place to you younger girls, and too, I am worried, just a little, because Gwendolyn does not write. It was a great sorrow to me, Pet, to find that she had left without saying good-bye, and I can't help but fear that I was hasty when I told her that she must plan her life apart from us if she could not be more harmonious."

Then, rising, she added: "Ah, well, things will surely turn out for the best, little girl. Come now, let us do our bit of tidying and then go over to the Settlement House and find out what my hours are to be."

But all that day, try as she might to be cheerful, the mothering heart of Gloria was filled with anxiety concerning her two charges. Would all be well with the venturous Bobs, and why didn't Gwen write?

CHAPTER VII.

BOBS SEEKS A PROFESSION

THERE was no anxiety in the heart of Roberta. In her short walking suit of blue tweed, with a jaunty hat atop of her waving brown hair, she was walking a brisk pace down Third Avenue. Even at that early hour foreign women with shawls over their heads and baskets on their arms were going to market. It was a new experience to Roberta to be elbowed aside as though she were not a descendant of a long line of aristocratic Vandergrifts. The fact that she was among them, made her one of them. was probably their reasoning, if, indeed, they noticed her at all, which she doubted. Gwen would have drawn her skirts close, fearing contamination, but not so Bobs. She reveled in the new experience, feeling almost as though she were abroad in Bohemia, Hungary or even Italy, for the dominant

nationality of the crowd changed noticeably before she had gone many blocks. How wonderfully beautiful were some of the young Italian matrons, Bobs thought; their dark eyes shaded with long lashes, their natural grace but little concealed by bright-colored shawls.

At one corner where the traffic held her up, the girl turned and looked at the store nearest, her attention being attracted by a spray of lilacs that stood within among piles of dusty old books. It seemed strange to see that fragrant bit of springtime in a gloomy second-hand shop so far from the country where it might have blossomed. As Bobs gazed into the shop, she was suddenly conscious of a movement within, and then, out of the shadows, she saw forms emerging. An old man with a long flowing beard and the tight black skull cap so often worn by elderly men of the East Side was pushing a wheeled chair in which reclined a frail old woman, evidently his wife. In her face there was an expression of suffering patiently borne which touched the heart of the young girl.

The chair was placed close to the window that the invalid might look out at the street if she wished and watch the panorama passing by.

Instantly Bobs knew the meaning of the lilac, or thought that she did, and, also, she at once decided that she wished to purchase a book, and she groped about in her memory trying to recall a title for which she might inquire. A detective story, of course, that was what she wanted. Since it was to be her chosen profession, she could not read too many of them.

The old man had disappeared by his time, but when Bobs entered the dingy shop the woman smiled up at her, and, to Roberta's surprise, she heard herself saying, "Oh, may I have just one little sniff of your lilac? I adore them, don't you?"

The woman in the chair nodded, and her reply was in broken English, which charmed her listener. She said that her "good man" bought her a "blossom by the flower shop" every day, though she did tell him he shouldn't, she knowing that to do it he had to go without himself, but it's the only "bit of brightness he can be giving me," my good man says.

Then she was silent, for from a little dark room at the back of the shop the old man, bent with years, shuffled forward. Looking at him, Roberta knew at once why he bought flowers and went without to do it, for there was infinite tenderness in the eyes

that turned first of all to the occupant of the wheeled chair.

Then he inquired what the customer might wish. Roberta knew that she had a very small sum in her pocket and that as yet she had not obtained work, but buy something she surely must, so she asked for detective stories.

The old man led her to a musty, dusty shelf and there she selected several titles, paid the small sum asked and inquired if he would keep the parcel for her until she returned later in the day.

Then, with another bright word to the little old woman, the girl was gone, looking back at the corner to smile and nod, and the last thing that she saw was the spray of lilacs that symbolized unselfish love.

With no definite destination in mind, Roberta crossed Third Avenue and walked as briskly as the throngs would permit in the direction of Fourth. In a mood, half amused, half serious, she began to soliloquize: "Now, Miss Roberta Vandergrift, it is high time that you were attempting to obtain employment in this great city. Suppose you go over to Fifth Avenue and apply for a position as sales girl in one of the fine stores where you used to spend money so lavishly?"

But, when the Fourth Avenue corner was reached, Roberta stopped in the middle of the street heedless of the seething traffic and stared at an upper window where she saw a sign that fascinated her:

BURNS FOURTH AVENUE BRANCH
DETECTIVE AGENCY

The building was old and dingy, the stairway rickety and dark, but Roberta in the spirit of adventure climbed to the second floor without a thought of fear. A moment later she was obeying a message printed on a card that hung on the first door in the unlighted hall which bade her enter and be seated.

This she did and admitted herself into a small waiting room beyond which were the private offices, as the black letters on the frosted glass of a swinging door informed her. Roberta sat down feeling unreal, as though she were living in a story book. She could hear voices beyond the door; one was quiet and calm, the other high pitched and excited.

The latter was saying: "I tell you I don't want no regular detective that any crook could get wise to, I want someone so sort of stupid-looking that a

thief would think she wouldn't get on to it if he lifted something right before her eyes."

It was harder for Roberta to hear the reply. However she believed that it was: "But, Mr. Queerwitz, we only have one woman in our employ just now, and she is engaged out of town. I——"

The speaker paused and looked up, for surely the door to his private office had opened just a bit. Nor was he mistaken, for Bobs, as usual, acting upon an impulse, stood there and was saying: "Pardon me for overhearing your conversation. I just couldn't help it. I came to apply for a position and I wondered if I would do." There was a twinkle in her eyes as she added: "I can look real stupid if need be."

The good-looking young man in the neat grey tweed, arose, and his expression was one of appreciative good humor.

"This is not exactly according to Hoyle," he remarked in his pleasant voice, "but perhaps under the circumstances it is excusable. May I know your name and former occupation?"

Roberta did a bit of quick mental gymnastics. She did not wish to give her real name. A Vandergrift in a Fourth Avenue detective agency! Even Gloria

might not approve of that. Almost instantly and in a voice that carried conviction, at least to the older man, the girl said: "Dora Dolittle."

Were the gray-blue eyes of the younger man laughing? The girl could not tell, for his face was serious and he continued in a more business-like manner: "Miss Dolittle, I am James Jewett. May I introduce Mr. Queerwitz, who has a very fine shop on Fifth Avenue, where he sells antiques of great value? Although he has lost nothing as yet, he reports that neighboring shops have been visited, presumably by a woman, who departs with something of value, and he wishes to be prepared by having in his employ a clerk whose business it shall be to discover the possible thief. Are you willing to undertake this bit of detective work? If, at the end of one week you have proved your ability in this line, I will take you on our staff, as we are often in need of a wide-awake young lady."

It was difficult for Roberta not to shout for joy.

"Thank you, Mr. Jewett," she replied as demurely as a gladly pounding heart would permit. "Shall I go with Mr. Queerwitz now?"

"Yes, and report to me each morning at eight o'clock."

The two departed, although it was quite evident that the merchant was not entirely pleased with the arrangement.

"Mr. Queerwitz! What a name!" Bobs was soliloquizing as she sat on the back seat of the big, comfortable limousine, and now and then glanced at her preoccupied companion. He was very rich, she decided, but not refined, and yet how strange that a man with unrefined tastes should wish to sell rarely beautiful things and antiques. Mr. Queerwitz was not communicative. In fact, he had tried to protest at the suddenly made arrangement and had declared to Mr. Jewett, in a brief moment when they were alone, that he shouldn't pay a cent of salary to that "upstart of a girl" unless she did something to really earn it. Mr. Jewett had agreed, saying that he would assume the responsibility; but of this Roberta knew nothing.

They were soon riding down Fifth Avenue in the throng of fine equipages with which she was most familiar, as often the handsome Vandergrift car had been one of the procession.

Bobs felt that she would have to pinch herself as she followed her portly employer into an exclusive art shop to be sure that she was that same Roberta

Vandergrift. Then she reminded herself that she must entirely forget her own name if she were to be consistently Dora Dolittle.

How Bobs hoped that she would be successful on this, her first case, that she might be permanently engaged by that interesting looking young man who called himself James Jewett.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW FRIEND

AT THAT early hour there were no customers in the shop, but Roberta saw three young women of widely varying ages who were dusting and putting things in order for the business of the day. Mr. Queerwitz went at once to a tall, spare woman of about fifty whose light, reddish hair suggested that the color had been applied from without.

"Miss Peerwinkle," he said rather abruptly, "here's the new clerk I was telling you about. You'd better show her the lay of things before it gets busy."

Miss Peerwinkle turned, and her washed-out blue eyes seemed to look down at Roberta from the great height where, at least, she believed that her position as head saleslady at the Queerwitz antique shop had placed her.

"Your name, Miss?" she inquired when the proprietor had departed toward a rear door labeled "No admittance."

Bobs had been so amused by all that she had seen that she hardly heard the inquiry, and when at last she did become conscious of it, for one wild moment she couldn't recall her new name, and so she actually hesitated. Luckily just then one of the girls called to Miss Peerwinkle to ask her about a tag, and in that brief moment Bobs remembered.

When the haughty "head lady" turned her coldly inquiring eyes again toward the new clerk, Roberta was able to calmly reply, "Dora Dolittle."

Miss Peerwinkle sniffed. Perhaps she was thinking it a poor name for an efficient clerk to possess. Bobs' sense of humor almost made her exclaim: "I ought to have chosen Dora Domuch." Then she laughingly assured herself that *that* wouldn't have done at all, as she did not believe that there *was* such a name and surely she *had* heard of Dolittle.

Bobs' soliloquy was broken in upon by a strident voice calling: "Miss Dolittle, you're not paying any attention to what I am saying. Right here and now, let me tell you day-dreaming isn't permitted in

this shop. I was telling you to go with Nell Wiggin to the cloakroom, and don't be gone more'n five minutes. Mr. Queerwitz don't pay salaries for prinking."

Bobs was desperately afraid that she wouldn't be able to get through the morning without laughing, and yet there was something tragic about the haughtiness of this poor Miss Peerwinkle.

Meekly she followed a thin, pale girl of perhaps twenty-three. The two who were left in the shop at once began to express their indignation because a new clerk had been brought in for them to train.

"If ever anybody looked the greenhorn, it's her," Miss Peerwinkle exclaimed disdainfully, and Miss Harriet Dingly agreed.

They said no more, for the new clerk, returning, said, "What am I to do first?" Unfortunately Roberta asked this of the one nearest, who happened to be Miss Harriet Dingly. That woman actually looked frightened as she said, nodding toward her companion, "Don't ask me. I'm not head lady. She is."

Again Bobs found it hard not to laugh, for Miss Peerwinkle perceptibly stiffened and her manner

seemed to say, "You evidently aren't used to class if you can't tell which folks are head and which aren't." But what she really said was: "Nell Wiggin will show you around, and do be careful you don't knock anything over. If you do, your salary's docked."

"I'll be very careful, Miss Peerwinkle," the new clerk said, but she was thinking, "Docked! My salary docked. I know what it is to dock a coal barge, for I have one in front of my home, but——"

"Oh, Miss Dolittle, please do watch where you go. You almost ran into that Venetian vase." There was real kindness and concern in the voice of the pale, very weary-looking young girl at her side, and in that moment Bobs knew that she was going to like her. "Poor little thing," Bobs thought. "She looks as though some unkind Fate had put out the light that ought to be shining in her heart. I wish that I might find a way to rekindle it."

Very patiently Miss Nell Wiggin explained the different departments in the antique shop. Suddenly she began to cough and sent a frightened glance toward the closed door that bore the sign "No Admittance," then stifled the sound in her handker-

chief. Nothing was said, but Roberta understood.

The old furniture greatly interested Bobs. In her own home there were many beautiful antiques. Casually she inquired, "How does Mr. Queerwitz manage to obtain so much rare old furniture?"

To her surprise, Nell Wiggin looked quickly around to be sure that no one was near, then she said: "I'd ought not to tell you, but I will if you'll keep it dark."

"Dark as the deepest dungeon," Roberta replied, much puzzled by her comrade's mysterious manner. The slight girl drew close. "He makes it behind that door that nobody's allowed to go through," she said in a low voice; then added, evidently wishing to be fair, "but that's nothing unusual. Lots of dealers make their antiques and the public goes on buying them knowing they may not be as old as the tags say. Here, now, are the old books, and at least they are honest."

Bobs uttered a cry of joy. "Oh, how I do wish I could have charge of this department," she said. "I adore old books."

There was a light in the pale face of little Miss Wiggin. "I do, too," she said. "That is, I love Dickens; I never read much else." Then, almost

wistfully, she added: "I didn't have much chance to go to school, but once, where I went to live, I found an old set of Dickens' books that someone had left, and I've just read them over and over. I never go out nights and the people living in those books are such a lot of company for me."

Again Bobs felt a yearning tenderness for this frail girl, who was saying, "They're all the friends I've ever had, I guess."

Impulsively the new clerk exclaimed, "I'll be your friend, if you'll let me." Just then a strident voice called, "Miss Wiggin, forward!"

"You stay with the books," Nell said softly, "and I'll do the china."

Bobs watched the slight figure that was hurrying toward the front, and she sighed, with tears close to the hazel eyes, and in her heart was a prayer, "May I be forgiven for the selfish, heedless years I have lived. But perhaps now I can make up for it. Surely I shall try."

Roberta had been told by Mr. Jewett that she must not reveal to anyne her real reason for being at the antique shop, and, as Mr. Queerwitz had no faith in the girl's ability to waylay a pilferer, he did not care to have Miss Nell Wiggin devote more time

to teaching her the business of selling antiques. This information was conveyed by Miss Peerwinkle to Nell, who was told to stay away from the new clerk, with the added remark: "If she didn't get on to the ropes with one hour's showing, she's too stupid for this business, anyhow."

Why the head lady had taken such a very evident dislike to her, Bobs could not understand, for surely she was willing to do whatever she was told. Ah, well, she wasn't going to worry. "Worrying is what makes one old," she thought, as she mounted a small step-ladder on casters that one could push along the shelves. From the top of it she examined the books that were highest. Suddenly she uttered an exclamation of delight, then looked about quickly to be sure that she had not been heard. Customers in the front part of the store occupied the attention of the three clerks, so Roberta reached for a volume that had attracted her attention. It was indeed rare and old, so very old that she wondered that the covers did not crumble, and it had illumined letters. "Perhaps they were made by early monks," Bobs was thinking. She sat down on the ladder and began turning the fascinating pages that were yellow with

age. Suddenly she was conscious that someone stood near her. She looked up to find the accusing gaze of the head clerk fixed upon her.

Bobs was startled into exclaiming: "Say, Miss Peerwinkle, a cat has nothing on you when it comes to walking softly, has it?"

The reply was frigidly given: "Miss Do-little," with emphasis, "you are supposed to dust the books, not read them; and what's more, that particular book is the rarest one in the whole collection. There's a mate to it somewhere, and when Mr. Queerwitz finds it, he can sell the two of them to Mr. Leonel Van Loon for one thousand dollars in cool cash."

Roberta was properly impressed, and replaced the book; then, taking a duster, she proceeded to tidy her department.

At eleven o'clock Bobs wondered if she ought to wander about the shop and watch the occasional customer. This she did, and was soon in the neighborhood of Miss Wiggin. "You're to go out to eat when I do," Nell told her.

"I'm glad to hear it," was the reply.

Promptly at noon Miss Wiggin beckoned and said: "Come, Miss Dolittle, be as quick as you can.

We only have half an hour nooning, and every minute counts. I go around to my room. You might buy something, then come with me and eat it."

Roberta could hardly believe what she had heard. "Only half an hour to wash, go somewhere, eat your lunch and get back?

"Why the mad rush?" she exclaimed. "Doesn't Mr. Queerwitz know there's all eternity ahead of us?"

A wan smile was the only answer. Miss Nell Wiggin was not wasting time. She led the way to the cloakroom, donned her outdoor garments, and then, taking her new friend by the hand, she said: "Hold fast to me. We'll take a short cut through the back stockroom. It's black as soot in there when it isn't lit up. Mr. Queerwitz won't let us burn lights except for business reasons."

Bobs found herself being led through a room so dark that she could barely see the two walls of boxes that were piled high on either side, with a narrow path between.

They soon emerged upon a back alley, where huge cans of refuse stood, and where trucks were continually passing up and down or standing at the back entrances of stores loading and unloading.

"Now walk as fast as you can," little Miss Wiggin said, as away she went toward Fourth Avenue, with Roberta close behind her. If Bobs had known what was going to happen that noon, she would not have left the shop.

CHAPTER IX.

A HURRIED LUNCH

FOURTH AVENUE having been reached, Miss Wiggin darted into a corner delicatessen store. "What will you have for your lunch?" she turned to ask of her companion. "I'm going to get five cents' worth of hot macaroni and a dill pickle."

"Double the order," Bobs said, and then she added to the man who stood behind the counter: "I'll also take two ham sandwiches and two chocolate eclairs."

"Oh, Miss Dolittle, isn't that too much for you to spend at noon?" This anxiously from pale, starved-looking little Miss Wiggin.

At the Vandergrift table there had always been many courses with a butler to serve, and in her heedless, thoughtless way, Bobs had supposed that everyone, everywhere, had enough to eat.

It was a queer little smile that she turned toward

her new friend as she replied: "This being our first lunch together, let's have a spread." Then she paid the entire bill, which came to forty cents. "No," she assured the protesting Nell Wiggin, "I won't offer to treat every day. After this we'll go Dutch, honest we will! Now lead the way."

Again in the thronged street, little Miss Wiggin turned with an apology: "Maybe I oughtn't to've asked you to come to my room. Probably you're used to something better."

"Don't you believe it!" Bobs replied cheerily. "I live in the shabbiest kind of a dump." She did not add that she had not as yet resided on New York's East Side for more than twenty-four hours, at the longest, and that prior to that her home on Long Island had been palatial. She was eager to know how girls who had never had a chance were forced to live. Miss Wiggin was descending rather rickety steps below the street level. "Is your room in the basement?" Bobs asked, trying to keep from her voice the shock that this revelation brought to her. No wonder there were no roses in the wan cheeks of little Miss Wiggin.

"Yes," was the reply, "the caretakers of the

buildings all live in the basements, you know, and Mrs. O'Malley, the janitor of this one, is a widow with two little boys. She had a room to rent cheap and so I took it."

Then she led the way through a long, narrow, dark hall. Once Bobs touched the wall and she drew back shuddering, for the stones were cold and clammy.

The little room to which Bobs was admitted opened only on an air shaft, but there was sunlight entering its one small window; too, there were white curtains and a geranium in bloom on the sill.

"It's always pleasantest at noon, for that's the only time that the sun reaches my window," the little hostess said, as she hurriedly drew a sewing table out from behind the small cot bed, unfolded it and placed the lunch thereon. Bobs' gaze wandered about the room, which was so small that its three pieces of furniture seemed to crowd it. In one corner was a bamboo bookcase which held the real treasure of Miss Wiggin. Row after row of books in uniform dark red binding. They were all there—Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Old Curiosity Shop and the rest of them.

"Nights it would be sort of dismal sitting in here alone if 'twasn't for those books," the little hostess confessed. "That's a real good kerosene lamp I have It makes a bright light. I curl up on the couch as soon as my supper's eaten, and then I forget where I really am, for I go wherever the story takes me Come, everything is ready," she added, "and since fifteen minutes of our time is gone already, we'd better eat without talking."

This they did, and Gloria would have said that they gulped their food, but what can one do with but half an hour for nooning?

They didn't even stop to put away the table. "I'll leave it ready for my supper tonight," Miss Wiggin said, as she fairly flew down the dark, damp basement hall.

Five minutes later they were entering the alley door of the antique shop which had so fine an entrance on Fifth Avenue.

"May the Fates save us!" Bobs exclaimed. "I do believe we are one minute late. Are we in for execution or dismissal?"

But that one minute had evidently escaped the watchful eye of Miss Peerwinkle, for, when Nell

Wiggin and Roberta entered the shop, they saw the portly Mr. Queerwitz pacing up and down and in tragic tones he was exclaiming: "Gone! Gone! I should have locked it up, but I didn't think anyone else knew the value of it." Then, wheeling around, he demanded of Bobs: "What good are you, anyway, in the book department? One of the rarest books I possess was stolen this morning right beneath your very eyes, and——"

Little Nell Wiggin, usually so timid, stepped forward and said: "It must have happened while we were out at lunch. It couldn't have been while we were here, for nobody at all went down to the books."

Mr. Queerwitz paid no more attention to the words of little Miss Wiggin than he would at that moment to the buzzing of a fly.

"Dolittle, well-named, I should say," he remarked scathingly. How Roberta wished that she had chosen a busier sounding name, but the deed was done. One couldn't be changing one's name every few hours, but——

Her revery was interrupted by: "What have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," was the honest reply.

"You are discharged," came the ultimatum.

Bobs was almost glad. "Very well, Mr. Queerwitz," she replied, and turning, she walked briskly toward the cloakroom.

When Bobs returned from the cloakroom, having donned her hat and jacket, she was informed that Mr. Queerwitz had just driven away, but that he hadn't said where he was going. Bobs believed that he was going to report her uselessness as a detective to her employer, James Jewett. Ah, well, let him go. Perhaps after all she had made a mistake in her choice of a profession. As she was passing she heard the older women talking.

Miss Harriet Dingley was saying, "Now I come to think of it, just after the girls went out to lunch, I did see a man come in, but I thought he was looking at china."

The head lady shot a none too pleasant glance at the other clerk as she said coldly, "Well, you aren't giving me any information. Didn't I watch every move he made like a cat watches a mouse hole? Just tell me that!"

"Oh, yes, Miss Peerwinkle. I'm not criticizing

anything you did. But you remember when a boy ran by shouting fire, we did go to the door to see where the fire was and a minute later the man went out and——"

"He went empty-handed," the head-woman said self-defendingly.

"I know he did. Now please don't think I'm criticizing you, but when he went out I noticed that he was a hunch-back, and I'm certain that he didn't have a hump when he came in."

"We'll not discuss the matter further," was said in a tone of finality as Miss Peerwinkle walked away with an air of offended dignity.

Bobs looked about for Nell, to whom she wished to say good-bye. She was glad that the youngest clerk was beyond the book shelves as Roberta was curious to know which book had been taken. A gap on the top shelf told the story. It was a rare old book for which one thousand dollars had been offered if its mate could be found.

"Whoever has taken the book has the other volume. I'm detective enough to know that," Roberta declared. Then she turned to find little Miss Wiggin standing at her side looking as sad as though some-

thing very precious was being taken away from her.

Impulsively Bobs held out both hands.

"Don't forget, Nell Wiggin, that you and I are to be friends, and what's more, next Sunday morning at ten o'clock sharp I'm coming down to get you and take you to my home for dinner. How would you like that?"

"Like it?" The dark eyes in the pale, wan face were like stars. "O, Miss Dolittle, what it will mean to me!"

Miss Harriet Dingley did nod when she heard Bobs singing out "Good-bye," but Miss Peerwinkle seemed to be as deaf as a statue.

"I could laugh," Bobs said to herself as she joined the throng on Fifth Avenue, "if my heart wasn't so full of tears. "I don't know as I can stand much more of seeing how the other half lives without having a good cry over it. Dickens, the only friend and comforter of that frail little mite of humanity!"

Then, as she turned again toward Avenue A, she suddenly remembered the package of detective stories for which she had promised to call at the shop where there was a spray of lilacs and a much-loved invalid woman.

"I guess I'll give up the detective game," she thought, as she hurried along, "but I'll enjoy reading the stories just the same."

Half an hour later she had changed her mind and had decided that she really was a very fine detective indeed.

CHAPTER X.

BOBS AS BOOKSELLER

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Bobs entered the musty book shop on the East Side and found the place unoccupied. However, the tinkling of a bell sounded in the back room and the little old man shuffled in. His expression was troubled, and when Roberta inquired for his invalid wife, he replied that she wasn't so well. "Poor Marlitta," he said, and there was infinite tenderness in his voice, "she's yearning to go back to the home country where our children are and their children, and the doctor thinks it might make her strong once again to be there. but the voyage costs money, and Marlitta would rather die here than not go honest."

The old man seemed to be overcome with emotion,

then suddenly recalling his customer's errand, he shuffled away to procure the package of detective stories for which she had called. During his absence Roberta went back of the counter, reached for a book on an upper shelf and, while so doing, dislodged several others that tumbled about her, revealing, as though it had been hidden in the dark recess back of them, the rare book which that morning had been taken from the Queerwitz Antique Shop.

That, then, was what the old man meant when he said that his Marlitta would not go unless she could "go honest."

The girl quickly replaced the books and then stood deep in thought. What could she do? What should she do? She knew that the gentle bookseller had taken the rare volume merely to try to save the life of the one dearest to him. When he returned with the package the girl heard herself asking:

"But you, if your Marlitta went to the home country, would you not be very lonely?"

There was infinite sadness in the faded eyes and yet, too, there was something else, a light from the soul that true sacrifice brings.

"Ah, that I also might go," he said; then with a

gesture that included all of the small dark shop, he added, "but these old books are all I have and they do not sell."

At that moment Roberta recalled the name of Lionel Van Loon, who, as Miss Peerwinkle had assured her, would pay one thousand dollars for the rare book and its mate. For a thoughtful moment the girl gazed at the lilac, then decided to tell the little old man all that she knew.

At first she regretted this decision when she saw the frightened expression in his gentle, child-like face, but she hastened to assure him that she only wanted to help him, and so she was asking him to send the stolen book back to the antique shop by mail.

When this had been done, Roberta, returning from the corner post box, found the old man gazing sadly at another volume which the girl instantly knew was the prized mate of the one she had just mailed.

"It's no use without the other," the bookseller told her, "and Mr. Queerwitz wouldn't pay what it's worth. He never does. He crowds the poor man to the wall and then crushes him."

"I have a plan," the girl told him. "Will you trust me with this book for a little while?"

Trust her? Who would not? For reply the old man held his treasure toward her. "Heaven bless you," was all that he said.

It was four o'clock when Bobs descended from a taxicab and mounted the steps of a handsome brown stone mansion on Riverside Drive. Mr. Van Loon was at home and, being a most kindly old gentleman and accustomed to receiving all manner of persons, he welcomed Roberta into his wonderful library, listened courteously at first, but with growing interest, when he realized that this radiant girl had a book to sell which she believed to be both rare and valuable. The eyes of the cultured gentleman plainly revealed his great joy when he actually saw the long-sought first volume.

"My dear young lady," he said, "you cannot know what it means to me to be able to obtain that book. I know where I can find its mate and so, I assure you, I will purchase it, the price being?—" He paused inquiringly.

Roberta heard, as though it were someone else speaking, her own voice saying: "Would one thousand dollars be too much, Mr. Van Loon?"

To a man whose hobby was collecting books, and who was many times a millionaire, it was not too much. "Will you have cash or a check?" he inquired.

"Cash, if you please."

It was six o'clock when Bobs handed the money to the overjoyed bookseller, who could not thank her enough. The little old woman again was by the window and she smiled happily as she listened to the words of the girl that fairly tumbled over each other in their eagerness to be spoken.

Then reaching out a frail hand to her "good man," and looking at him with a light in her eyes that Bob would never forget, she said: "Caleb, now we can both go home to our children."

Roberta promised to return the following day to help them prepare for the voyage. She was turning away when the little woman called to her: "I want you to have my lilac," she said, as she held the blossoming spray toward the girl.

It was half past six o'clock when Bobs reached home. Gloria was watching for her rather anxiously, but it was not until they were gathered about the fireplace for the evening that Bobs told her story.

"Here endeth my experience as a detective," she concluded.

But Roberta was mistaken.

CHAPTER XI.

A QUEER GIFT

TRUE to her promise Roberta had gone on the following afternoon to assist her new friends to prepare for their voyage, but to her amazement she found that they had departed, but the janitress living in the basement was on the watch for the girl and at once she ascended the stone stairs and inquired: "Are you Miss Dolittle?"

Bobs replied that she was, and the large woman, in a manner which plainly told that she had a message of importance to convey, whispered mysteriously, "Wait here!"

Down into the well of a stairway she disappeared, soon to return with an envelope containing something hard, which felt as though it might be a key.

This it proved to be. The writing in the letter had been painstakingly made, but the language was

not English, and Bobs looked at it with so frankly puzzled an expression that the woman, who had been standing near, watching curiously, asked: "Can I read it for you?"

Strange things surely had happened since the Vandergrifts had gone to the East Side to live, but this was the strangest of all. It was hard for Roberta to believe that she heard aright. The old man had written that his entire stock was worth no more than five hundred dollars, and since Roberta had procured more than that sum for him, he was making her a gift of the books that remained, and requested that she remove them at once, as the rent on the shop would expire the following day.

The janitress, with an eye to business, at once said that her son, Jacob, was idle and could truck the books for the young lady wherever she wished them to go. It was two o'clock in the afternoon when this conversation took place, and at five o'clock Gloria and Lena May, returning from the Settlement House, were amazed to see a skinny horse drawing a two-wheeled ash cart stopping at the curb in front of the Pensinger mansion. The driver was a Hebrew lad, but at his side sat no less a personage

than Roberta, who beamed down upon her astonished sisters.

After a moment of explanation the three girls assisted the boy Jacob to cart all the books to one of the unoccupied upper rooms, and when he had driven away Roberta sank down upon a kitchen chair and laughed until she declared that she ached. Lena May, busy setting the table for supper, merrily declared: "Bobs, what a girl you are to have adventures. Here Glow and I have been on the East Side just as long as you have, and nothing unusual has happened to us."

"Give it time," Roberta remarked as she rose to wash her hands. "But now I seem to have had a new profession thrust upon me. Glow, how would it do to open an old book shop out on the front lawn?"

"I'll prophesy that these books will fill a good need some day, perhaps, when we're least expecting it," was Gloria's reply.

Then, as they sat eating their evening meal together and watching the afterglow of the sunset on the river, that was so near their front door, at last Bobs said: "Do see those throngs of poor tired-out women trooping from the factory. Now they will

go to the Settlement House and get their children, go home and cook and wash and iron and darn and—" she paused, then added, "How did we four girls ever manage to live so near all this and know nothing about it? I feel as though I had been the most selfish, useless, good-for-nothing——"

"Here, here, young lady. I won't allow you to call my sister such hard names," Glow said merrily as she rose to replenish their cups of hot chocolate. Then, more seriously, she added as she reseated herself: "Losing our home seemed hard, but I do believe that we three are glad that something happened to make us of greater use in the world."

"I am," Lena May said, looking up brightly. She was thinking of the sandpile at the Settlement House over which she had presided that afternoon.

And Gloria concluded: "I know that I would be more nearly happy than I have been since our mother died, if only I knew where Gwendolyn is."

And where was Gwendolyn, the proud, selfish girl who had not tried to make the best of things? Gloria would indeed have been troubled had she but known.

CHAPTER XII.

A YOUNG MAN ENTERS

It was early Sunday morning. "Since we are to have your little friend, Nell Wiggin, to dinner today," Gloria remarked as the three sat at breakfast, "suppose we also invite Miss Selenski. It will be a nice change for her."

"Good!" Bobs agreed. "That's a splendid suggestion. Now what is the program for the day?"

"Lena May has consented to tell Bible stories to the very little children each Sunday morning at the Settlement House," Gloria said, "and I have asked a group of the older girls who are in one of my clubs to come over here this afternoon for tea and a quiet hour around the fireplace. I thought it would be a pleasant change for them, and I want you girls to become acquainted with them so when I mention their names you will be able to picture them. They

really are such bright, attractive girls! The Settlement House is giving them the only chance that life has to offer them." Then, smiling lovingly at the youngest, Gloria concluded: "Lena May has consented to pour, and you, Bobs, I shall expect to provide much of the entertainment."

Roberta laughed. "Me?" she asked. "What am I to do?"

"O, just be natural." Gloria rose and began to clear the table as she added: "Now, Bobs, since you have to go after your friend, Miss Wiggin, Lena May and I will prepare the dinner. We have it planned, but we're going to surprise you with our menu."

It was nine o'clock when Roberta left the Pensinger mansion. It was the first Sunday that the girls had spent on the East Side, and what a different sight met the eyes of Bobs when she started down the nearly deserted street, on one side of which were the wide docks.

Derricks were silent and the men who lived on the barges were dressed in whatever holiday attire they possessed. They were seated, some on gunwales, others on rolls of tarred rope, smoking and

talking, and save for an occasional steamer loaded with folk from the city who were sailing away for a day's outing, peace reigned on the waterfront, for even the noise of the factory was stilled.

Turning the corner at Seventy-eighth Street, Roberta was surprised to find that the boys' playground was nearly deserted. She had supposed that at this hour it would be thronged. Just as she was puzzling about it, a lad with whom she had a speaking acquaintance emerged from a doorway and she hailed him:

"You're all dressed up, Antovich, aren't you? Just like a regular little gentleman. Are you going to Sunday school?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; that is, I donno as 'tis. Mr. Hardinian doesn't go to call it that. He calls it a boys' club by Treasure Seekers. There's a clubhouse over to Seventy-fifth Street. I say, Miss Bobs, I wish for you to come and see it. I sure wish for you to."

Roberta assured the eager lad that she might look in a little later, then bidding him good-bye, she turned in to the model tenement house to ask Miss Selenski to a one o'clock dinner.

"Oh, how lovely and sunny and sweet smelling your little home is," Bobs said three minutes later when she had been admitted to the small apartment, the front windows of which overlooked the glistening blue river.

"I like it," was the bright reply of the slender dark-eyed girl who lived there.

Bobs continued: "How I wish the rich folk who built this would influence others to do the same. Take that rookery across the street, for instance. It looks as though a clap of thunder would crash it to the ground, and it surely is a fire trap."

"It is indeed that," Miss Selenski said, "and though I have reported it time and again, the very rich man who owns it finds it such excellent income property that he manages to evade an injunction to have the place torn down. Some day we'll have a terrible tragedy of some kind over there, and then perhaps—" she paused and sighed. "But, since we can't help, let's talk of pleasanter things."

Bobs then informed Miss Selenski that she had come to invite her to dinner that day, and the little agent of the model apartments indeed was pleased, and replied: "Some time soon I shall invite you girls

over here and give you just Hungarian dishes." Then Bobs departed, and as she walked down Fourth Avenue she glanced with rather an amused expression up at the windows of the Detective Agency of which, for so brief a time, she had been an employee. She wondered what that good-looking young man, James Jewett, had thought of her, for, surely, her recent employer would have at once telephoned that as a detective she had been "no good." Then she decided that she probably never would learn, as she most certainly would not again return to the agency. But little do we know what fate holds in store for us.

Nell Wiggin was ready and waiting, and she looked very sweet indeed, with her corn yellow hair fluffed beneath her neat blue hat, her eyes eager, her cheeks, usually pale, flushed with this unusual excitement. Her suit was neat and trim, though made of cheap material.

"You're right on time to the very minute, aren't you, Miss Dolittle?" she said happily, as she opened the door to admit her new friend.

"I sure am," was the bright reply. "I'm the original on the dot man, or young lady, I should say." But while Bobs was speaking there was misgivings

in her heart. She had forgotten to ask Gloria what she ought to do about her name. Should they all be Dolittles or Vandergrifts? She decided to take Nell into her confidence and tell her the story of the assumed name.

The listener did not seem at all surprised. "Lots of girls who go out to work change their names," she said. "It's just as honest as writing stories under a different name, I should think."

"That's so," Roberta agreed, much relieved. "A nom-de-plume isn't much different."

"And so you are a detective?" Nell looked at her friend with a little more awe, perhaps.

"Heavens no! Not now!" Bobs was quick to protest. "I merely tried it, and failed."

"Well, as it turned out, a detective wasn't needed on that particular case." Nell was giving Bob the very information she was eager to receive, but for which she did not wish to ask. "The next day the stolen book came back by mail." Roberta knew that she ought to register astonishment, but instead, she laughed. "What did Mr. Queerwitz say?" she inquired.

"Oh, they all put it down to conscience. That

does happen, you know. You read about conscience money being returned every now and then in the newspapers, but the strangest part was, that that very afternoon Mr. Van Loon came in and said that he had been able to obtain the first volume and wished to purchase the second. Mr. Queerwitz was out at the time, and so Miss Peerwinkle sold it to him for five hundred dollars."

Bobs wanted to laugh again. It amused her to think that she had driven the better bargain, but she thought it unwise to appear too interested in the transaction, and so she changed the subject, and together they walked up Third Avenue.

"How different it all is on Sunday," Nell Wiggin smiled happily at her new friend. She had indeed spoken truly. The venders' carts were conspicuous by their absence and the stores, if they were open, seemed to be more for the social gathering of foreign folk dressed in their gay best, than for active business. Even the elevated trains thundered overhead with much longer intervals in between, and sometimes, for as long as fifteen minutes, the peace of Sunday seemed to pervade that unlovely East Side.

Bobs, noting a Seventy-fifth Street sign, stopped and gazed down toward the river, and sure enough she saw a long, low building labeled Boys' Club House.

"Let's go through this way to Second," Bobs suggested. In front of the clubhouse there was a group of boys with faces so clean that they shone, and one of these, leaving the others, raced up to the girls, and taking his friend by the hand, he said: "Oh, Miss Bobs, you did for to come, didn't you? Please stop in by the clubhouse. It will to please Mr. Hardinian."

Roberta's smile seemed to convey consent, and she found herself being rapidly led toward a wide-open door. Nell willingly followed. The sound of band practice came from within, but, when the lad appeared with the smiling guest, a young man, who had been playing upon a flute, arose and at once advanced toward them. What dark, beautiful eyes he had! "Why," Roberta exclaimed in surprise. "We saw Mr. Hardinian the very first day we came in this neighborhood to live. He was helping a poor sick woman who had fallen, and—" But she could say no more, for the small boy was eagerly

telling the clubmaster that this was his "lady friend" and that her name was Miss Bobs. The young man smiled and said that he was always glad to have visitors. "What a musical voice!" was Bobs' thought.

Then, turning to the girl who had remained by the open door, she held out a hand. "This is my friend, Nell Wiggin. I am sure that we will both be interested in knowing of your work, Mr. Hardinian, if you have time to spare."

"Indeed I have, always, for those who are interested." Then the young man told them of his many clubs for boys.

Roberta looked about with interest. "Why are there so many wide shelves all around the walls, Mr. Hardinian?" she asked at last.

The young man smiled. "If you will come some night at ten o'clock you will find a little street urchin, some homeless little fellow, tucked up in blankets asleep on each of those shelves, as you call their bunks. Maybe you do not know, but even in the bitterest winter weather many small boys sleep out in the streets or creep into doorways and huddle together to keep warm. That is, they used to before I came. Now they are all welcome in here."

Roberta wished she might ask this wonderful young man where he came from, but that would not do on so slight an acquaintance, and so thanking him and bidding him good morning, with Nell and Antovich, she again started for home.

Though Roberta little dreamed it, the wonderful young man had come into the drama of their lives, and was to play a very important part.

CHAPTER XIII.

NELL WIGGIN'S STORY

SUCH a merry dinner party as it was in one corner of the big southeast corner room of the old Pensinger mansion. The young hostesses by neither word nor manner betrayed the fact that they were used to better things. When at last the dishes had been washed and put away, a fire was started on the wide hearth in the long salon and the girls gathered about it.

"Suppose we each tell the story of our lives," Gloria suggested, "and in that way we may the sooner become really acquainted.

"For ourselves a few words will suffice. We three girls lived very happily in our Long Island home until our dear mother died; then, last year, our beloved father was taken, and since then I, be-

cause I am oldest, have tried to be both parents to my younger sisters."

"And truly you have succeeded," Bobs put in. Gloria smiled lovingly at her hoidenish sister, who sat on a low stool close to the fire, her arms folded about her knees.

"But we soon found that in reality the roof that had sheltered us from childhood was not really our own. The title, it seems, had not been clear in the very beginning, when our great-grandfather had purchased it, and so, because of this, we had to move. I wanted to do settlement work, and that is what I am doing now. Lena May also loves the work, and is soon to have classes for the very little boys and girls. Bobs, as we call this tom-boy sister of ours, as yet, I believe, has not definitely decided upon a profession."

Roberta's eyes were laughing as she glanced across at Nell Wiggin, but since Miss Selenski did not know the story of her recent adventure, nothing was said.

Turning to the slender, dark-eyed agent of the model tenements, Gloria remarked: "Will you now tell us a little about yourself, Miss Selenski?"

All through the dinner hour the girls had noticed a happy light that seemed to linger far back in the nearly black orbs of the Hungarian girl, but they thought it was her optimistic nature that gladdened her eyes; but now, in answer to Gloria's question, the dark, pretty face became radiant as the girl replied: "The past holds little worth the telling, but the future, I believe, will hold much."

"Oh, Miss Selenski," Bobs exclaimed, leaning forward eagerly and smiling at their Hungarian friend, "something wonderful is about to happen in your life, I am sure of that."

Shining-eyed, the dark girl nodded. "Do you want to guess what?"

It was Lena May who answered: "I think you are going to be married," she said.

"I am," was the joyfully given reply. "To a young man from my own country who has a business in the Bronx; nor is that all, he owns a little home way out by the park and there is a real yard about it with flowers and trees. Oh, can you understand what it will mean to me to be awakened in the morning by birds instead of by the thundering noise of overhead trains?"

"Miss Selenski," Gloria said, "we are glad indeed that such a happy future awaits you." Then turning to little Nell Wiggin, who sat back somewhat in the shadow, though now and then the flickering firelight changed her corn-yellow hair to a halo of golden sheen, she asked kindly: "Is there some bit of your past that you wish to tell us?"

There was something so infinitely sorrowful in the pale pinched face of little Nell Wiggin that instinctively the girls knew that the story they would hear would be sad, nor were they mistaken.

Nell Wiggin began: "It is not interesting, my past, and I fear that it is too sad for a story, but briefly I will tell it: My twin brother, Dean, and I were born on a farm in New England which seemed able to produce but little on its rocky soil, and though our father managed to keep us alive, he could not pay off the mortgage, and each year he grew more troubled in spirit. At last he heard of rich lands in the West that might be homesteaded and so, leaving us one spring, he set out on foot, for he planned taking up a claim, and when he had constructed there a shelter of some kind, Mother was to sell the New England farm, pay off the mortgage

and with whatever remained buy tickets that would take us west to my father.

"It was May when he left us. He did not expect to reach his destination for many weeks, as he knew that he would have to stop along the way to work for his food.

"Dear little Mother tried to run the farm that summer. Dean and I were ten years of age, and though we could do weeding and seeding, we could not help with the heavier work, and since our mother was frail much of this had to be left undone.

"Fate was against us, it would seem, for the rain was scarce and our crops poor, and the bitterly cold winter found us with but little provisions in store. In all this time we had not heard from Father, and after the snows came we knew the post office in the town twenty miles away could not be reached by us until the following spring, and so we could neither receive nor send a letter.

"Our nearest neighbor was eight miles away, and he was but a poor scrabbler in the rocky soil, a kind-hearted hermit of whom Brother and I had at first been afraid, because of his long bushy beard, perhaps, but when we once chanced to be near enough

to see his kind gray eyes, we loved him and knew that he was a friend, and the future surely was to prove this. But, if possible, that dear old man, Mr. Eastland, was poorer than we were.

"Our mother, we knew, was worried nearly to the point of heartbreak, but I shall never forget how wonderful she was that winter. Whenever we looked, she smiled at us, tremulously sometimes, and when our task of shelling and pounding corn was over, she helped us invent little games and told us beautiful stories that she made up. But for all her outward cheer, I now realize, when we children were asleep on the mattress that had been brought from the cold bedroom and placed on the floor near the stove, that our mother spent many long hours on her knees in prayer.

"Our cow had been sold before the snow came, as money had been needed to pay on the mortgage, and so we had no milk. Our few hens were kept in a lean-to shed during the day, but Mother permitted them to roost behind the stove on those bitterly cold nights, and so occasionally we had eggs, and a rare feast it was, but at last our supply of corn was nearly exhausted.

"There was usually a thaw in January, but instead, this exceptionally cold winter brought a blizzard which continued day after day, burying our house deep in snow. At last Mother had to tell us that unless a thaw came that we might procure some provisions from our neighbors, we would have to kill our three hens for food. What we would do after that, she did not say; but, luckily, for the feathered members of our family, the thaw did come and with it came Mr. Eastland, riding the eight miles on his stout little mule, and fastened to the saddle, back of him, was a bag of corn and potatoes. Dear, kind man! He must have brought us half of his own remaining store. Eagerly our mother asked if there had been news from town, but he shook his head. 'No one's been through with the mail, Mis' Wiggin,' he said; then he added: 'I s'pose likely you're powerful consarned about that man o' yourn. I s'pose you haven't heard from him yet, Mis' Wiggin?'

"Mother tried to answer, but her lips quivered and she had to turn away.

" 'Well, so long, folks!' the old man called, 'I'll be over agin 'fore spring, the snow permittin'.'

"We children climbed on the gate and stood as high as we could to watch our good friend ride away. What we did not know until later, was that as soon as he was out of our sight, he turned and rode that twenty miles to the village post office. A week later Mother was indeed surprised to see Mr. Eastland returning, and this time he brought a letter. It was with eager joy that Mother leaped forward to take it, but it was with a cry of grief that she covered her face with her hands and hurried into the house. The letter had fallen, and I picked it up and glanced at it. Father never got there, it said, but when he knew he was going to die he asked someone to write. He had worked days and walked nights and died of exposure and exhaustion.

"Spring came and with the first balmy days our mother was taken from us. We children were eleven years old then, and we knew not what to do.

"We must go to Mr. Eastland," Dean said. "He would want us to."

"We went, and that good man took us in, and made a home for us until—" she paused and looked around, but as her listeners did not speak, she added:

"Perhaps this is all too sad, perhaps you will not care to hear the rest."

"Please do tell us, dear Nell," Gloria said, and so the frail girl continued her story.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLEASANT PLAN

"THE summer following our mother's death was hot and dry," the frail girl continued, "and the grass around Mr. Eastland's shack, though tall from early rains, was parched in August.

"One morning before he rode in town, our foster-father jokingly told my brother Dean that he would leave the place in his care. 'Don't ye let anything happen to it, sonny,' he said.

"Dean, who is always serious, looked up at the old man on the mule as he replied: 'I'll take care of it, Daddy Eastland, even with my life.'

"We thought nothing of this. My brother was a dreamer, living, it sometimes seemed, in a world of his own creating. I now realize that my foster-father and I did not quite understand him.

"It was an intensely hot day. How the grass got

on fire I do not know, but about noon I heard a cry from Dean, who had been lying for hours on the ground in the shade of the shack reading a book of poetry that a traveling missionary had brought to him. He had visited us six months before and had promised the next time he came that he would bring a book for my brother.

"When I heard Dean's cry of alarm and saw him leap to his feet and run toward a swiftly approaching column of smoke, I also ran, but not being as fleet of foot, I was soon far behind him. He had caught up a burlap bag as he passed a shed; then, on he raced toward the fire. I, too, paused to get a bag, but when I started on I saw my brother suddenly plunge forward and disappear.

"He had caught his foot in a briar and had fallen into a thicket which, a moment later, with a crackle and roar leaped into flame.

"His cap had slipped over his face, thank heaven, and so his truly beautiful eyes and features were spared, but his body was badly burned when the fire had swept over him.

"The wind had veered very suddenly and turned the flame back upon the charred land and so, there being nothing left to burn, it was extinguished.

"It was at that moment that Daddy Eastland returned. He lifted my unconscious brother out of the black, burnt thicket and carried him to the shack.

" 'Boy! Boy!' he said, and I never will forget the sob there was in his voice. 'Why did you say ye'd take care of the old place with your life? 'Twasn't worth one hair on yer head.'

"But Dean was not dead. Slowly, so slowly he came back to life, but his left arm was burned to the bone and his side beneath it. Then, because of the pain, his muscles tightened and he could not move his arm.

"We were so far from town that perhaps he did not have just the right care. Once a month a quack physician made the rounds of those remote farms.

"However, he did the best that he could, and a year later Dean was able to walk about. How like our mother he was, so brave and cheerful!

" 'I am glad that it is my left arm that will not move, Sister,' he often said. 'I have a use for my right arm.'

"Our foster-father, noting how it pleased the lad, invented tasks around the farm that a one-armed boy could do to help, but when he was fourteen years of age I discovered what he had meant when he

said that he had a use for his right arm. He had a little den of his own in the loft of the old barn with a big opening that overlooked meadow lands, a winding silver ribbon of a river and distant hills, and there he spent hours every day writing.

"At last he confessed that he was trying to make verse like that in his one greatly treasured book. It was his joy, and he had so little that I encouraged him, though I could not understand his poetry. I am more like our father, who was a faithful plodding farmer, and Dean is like our mother, who could tell such wonderful stories out of her own head.

"At last, when I was eighteen years old, I told Daddy Eastland that I wanted to go to the city to earn my own way and send some money back for Dean. How the lad grieved when I left, for he said that he was the one who should go out in the world and work for both of us, but I told him to keep on with his writing and that maybe, some day, he would be able to earn money with his poetry.

"So I came to town and began as an errand girl in a big department store.

"Now I earn eighteen dollars a week and I send half of it back to the little rocky farm in New England. Too, I send magazines and books, but now

a new problem has presented itself. Mr. Eastland has died, and Dean is alone, and so I have sent for him to come and live with me.

"How glad I shall be to see him, but I dread having him know where I live. He will guess at once that I chose a basement room that I might have money to send to him."

It was Miss Selenski who interrupted: "Miss Wiggin," she said, "while you have been talking, I have chosen you to be my successor. Tomorrow I am to be married, and I promised the ladies who built the model tenements that I would find someone fitted to take my place before I left. The pay is better than you are getting. It is twenty-five dollars a week, with a sunny little apartment to live in. I want all of you girls to come to my wedding and then, when I am gone, Miss Wiggin, you can move right in, and you will be there to welcome that wonderful brother of yours."

It would be hard to imagine a happier girl than Nell when she learned that a brighter future awaited her than she had dared to dream. She tried to thank her benefactor, but her sensitive lips quivered and the girls knew that she was so overcome with emotion that she might cry, and so Miss Selenski began

at once to tell them about her wedding plans, and then, soon after she had finished, the girls who had been invited for tea arrived. Miss Selenski knew many of them, and so the conversation became general and little Nell Wiggin was permitted to quietly become accustomed to her wonderful good fortune before she was again asked to join in the conversation. Bobs walked with her to the elevated, and merry plans she laid for the pleasant times the Vandergrifts were to have with their new neighbors.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DETECTIVE DETECTED

One Monday, at high noon, the pretty Miss Selenski was married in the Hungarian church and her four new friends were among the many foreign women who came to wish their kindly neighbor much happiness in her new life.

Gloria had been pleased with the earnest face of the man who had won the love of little Miss Selenski, and when the smiling pair rode away on an automobile delivery truck, which was their very own, the Vandergrift girls, with Nell Wiggin, stood on a crowded street corner and waved and nodded, promising that very soon they would visit the little home, with a yard around it, that was out near the woodsy Bronx Park.

Bobs at the last moment had tied an old shoe to the back of the truck with a white ribbon, and there

it hung dangling and bobbing in a manner most festive, while through a small hole in the sole of it a stream of rice trickled, but in the thronging, surging masses of East Side humanity this little drama was scarcely noticed.

When Mr. and Mrs. Cheniska had disappeared up Third Avenue, Gloria turned to smile at little Nell Wiggin.

"Now, let us make haste to get your new apartment in order that you may wire your brother to come at once; that is, if a wire will reach him."

"Yes, indeed it will, and he is eagerly awaiting it," Nell happily replied. "Since our foster-father's death my brother has been living in town with the missionary of whom I told you, the one who used to visit the remote farms and who brought my brother, years ago, his first book of poetry. They have been close friends ever since."

But when the girls reached the little apartment, they found that there was nothing to be done. It was in perfect order, and the thoughtful bride had even left part of her wedding flowers that they might be there to welcome the new agent of the model tenements.

"There seems to be nothing to do here," beamingly Miss Wiggin said. "Perhaps I would better go at once to my room and pack."

"I will go with you and help," Bobs told her.

"Then both of you come to the Pensinger mansion for lunch," Lena May suggested.

"What did you do about notifying Mr. Queerwitz?" Bobs inquired an hour later as the two girls started down Fourth Avenue toward the basement home of Nell Wiggin.

"Nothing as yet. That is, I merely telephoned that I would not be there today. I suppose I will have to give two weeks' notice Let us go there at once and I will do so."

When the two girls entered the Queerwitz Antique Shop, Miss Peerwinkle seemed to be much excited because of their arrival and, hastening to the rear door, which was labeled "No Admittance," she gave three sharp raps and then hurried back and took up her post near the front door, as though to prevent escape in that direction.

Bobs looked all around, wondering if there was a customer in the store who was being watched, but she and Nell seemed to be the only other occupants

of the place. To add to the mysteriousness, Miss Harriet Dingley, upon receiving a nod from the head lady, walked to the entrance of the cloakroom, deliberately turned the key and put it in her pocket.

Bobs, always on the alert, noted all this and marveled at it. Surely Nell Wiggin had done nothing to arouse the suspicion of Mr. Queerwitz! Then, suddenly, a very possible solution of the mystery flashed into Roberta's consciousness.

Undoubtedly Mr. Queerwitz suspected that the late Miss Dolittle had something to do with the disappearance, reappearance and subsequent sale of the rare old book. She well knew how enraged the grasping shopkeeper would be if he learned that he had received only half as much for the second volume as had been paid by Mr. Van Loon for the first, and if that gentleman had described the girl who had sold the book to him! Bobs actually smiled as she thought. "I guess I'm trapped all right. A fine detective I would make when I never even thought to wear a disguise. Well, the game's up!"

She knew that she ought to feel troubled when she saw Mr. Queerwitz emerge from his secret sanctum and approach her, looking about as friendly as

a thunder cloud, but, instead, that irrepressible girl felt amused as though she were embarking upon another interesting adventure, and she actually smiled to greet him. Bobs was depending upon her natural quick-wittedness to save her from whatever avalanche of wrath was about to descend upon her.

She had glanced beyond the man, then suddenly she stared as though amazed at what she saw back of him. The shopkeeper, noting this, turned and observed that in his haste he had neglected to latch the door labeled "No Admittance," and that a draught of air had opened it.

Beyond plainly were seen several workmen engaged in making antique furniture. Mr. Queerwitz looked sharply at the girl, trying to learn, if possible, how much of his secret had been revealed to her.

His anger increased when he saw that her eyes were laughing. "What puzzles me," she was saying, innocently, "is how you can make things look worm-eaten as well as time-worn."

Whatever accusations might have been on the lips of Mr. Queerwitz when he approached Roberta, they were never uttered. Instead he turned and walked rapidly back to his workshop and closed the door,

none too quietly, but in a manner that seemed to convince Miss Peerwinkle that she and Miss Dingley need no longer guard the entrances.

How Bobs wanted to laugh, but instead she walked over to Nell Wiggin, who had been collecting the few things that she had at the shop.

"Have you given notice?" Roberta inquired.

"I wrote a note and asked Miss Peerwinkle to give it to Mr. Queerwitz. Come, let us go."

Half an hour later Nell Wiggin was packing her few garments in a suitcase, while Roberta tied up the precious books. Two hours later the new agent of the model tenements was established in the sunny apartment and her row of red-bound books stood on one shelf of the built-in bookcase.

"Now I will wire my brother Dean that he may come as soon as he wishes; and oh, how I do hope that will be soon," Nell said as she happily surveyed the pleasantest place that she had ever called home.

The message was sent when they were on their way to the Pensinger mansion for lunch.

"I must not remain long," the new agent told Gloria, "for I promised Mrs. Doran-Ashley that I would be on duty at one."

Every little while during that noon meal Bobs would look up with laughing eyes. At last she told the cause of her mirth. "I am wondering what Mr. James Jewett thinks of his assistant detective," she remarked. "I am so glad that I gave the name Miss Dolittle. Now I can retire from the profession without being traced."

"Oh, good, here comes the postman," Lena May declared as she rose and went to the side door to meet the mail-carrier. Gloria looked up eagerly. She was always hoping that Gwendolyn would write. The letters that she had sent to the Newport home of the schoolmate whom Gwendolyn had said that she was going to visit, had been returned, marked "Whereabouts not known."

There were two letters and both were for Bobs. One was a bulging missive from her Long Island friend, Dick De Laney, but it was at the other that the girl stared as though in uncomprehending amazement. The cause of her very evident astonishment was the printed return address in the upper left-hand corner. It was "Fourth Avenue Branch, Burns Detective Agency." Then she glanced, still puzzled, at her own name, which was written, not typed.

"Miss Roberta Vandergrift," she read aloud. Then suddenly she laughed, and looking up at the other girls who, all interest, were awaiting an explanation of her queer conduct, she exclaimed: "The amateur detective has been detected, but how under the shining heavens did Mr. James Jewett know that my name wasn't Miss Dolittle?"

Gloria smiled. "You haven't much faith, it would seem, in his ability as a detective. What has he written, Bobs?"

There were few words in the message:

"Miss Vandergrift, please report at this office at once, as we have need of your services. Signed. J. G. Jewett."

"Well, I'll be flabbergasted!" Roberta ejaculated. "But I must confess I am curious, and so I will immediately, if not sooner, hie me down that way. Wait a jiff, Miss Wiggin. I'll walk along with you."

When Roberta and Nell were gone, Gloria found the bulging letter from Bobs' oldest friend, Dick De Laney, lying on the table unopened. The girl who was so loved by that faithful lad had quite forgotten it in her new interests. Gloria sighed. "Poor Dick," she said to Lena May as she placed the letter on a

mantel, "I wish he did not care so much for Roberta for I fear that she does not really care for him."

True it was that at that particular moment Bobs was far more interested in learning what Mr. Jewett had to tell her than in any message that a letter from Dick might contain.

CHAPTER XVI.

A NEW "CASE" FOR BOBS

THE outer office of the Fourth Avenue Branch of the Burns Detective Agency was vacant when the girl entered, but almost instantly the door of the inner office opened and Mr. Jewett himself stood there. His pleasant face brightened when he saw his visitor. Advancing with his right hand extended, he exclaimed: "Miss Vandergrift, I am almost surprised to see you. I really feared that you had deserted your new profession."

"But—Mr. Jewett—I—that is—my name. I told you that it was Miss Dolittle."

The young man drew forward a chair for her, then seated himself at his desk, and again Roberta realized that, although his face was serious, his gray-blue eyes were smiling.

"The letter I sent to you was addressed to Miss Roberta Vandergrift," he said, "and, since you have replied in person, am I not justified in believing that to be your real name?"

Bob flushed. "I'll have to acknowledge that it is," she said, "but the other day when you asked me my name, I didn't quite like to give that of our family and so, at random, I chose one." Then the girl smiled frankly at him. "I couldn't have chosen a worse one, it seems. Miss Dolittle did not impress my late employer as being a good name for a clerk."

"You are wrong there," the young man told her, and at last there was no mistaking the fact that he was amused. "Mr. Queerwitz decided that you did too much and not too little. I don't know when I have been so pleased as I was over the fact, which so disturbs him, that you were able to drive the better bargain. Mr. Queerwitz has excelled in that line, and to have a mere slip of a girl obtain one thousand dollars for a book, the mate of which brought him but five hundred dollars, is humiliating to say the least."

Then, leaning forward, the young man said, with

evident interest: "Miss Vandergrift, will you tell me what happened?"

Roberta's expression was sphynx-like. "I understand, Mr. Jewett," she replied, "that one need not give incriminating evidence against oneself."

Then her eyes twinkled. "And what is more," she told him, "I don't believe that it is necessary. This office seems to have ferrited out the facts."

"You are right," the young man confessed, "and now I will tell you just what happened. It seems that while you were out for lunch Mr. Queerwitz, or one of his assistants, discovered that the rare book was missing. He phoned me at once and reported that his head clerk believed that you had taken the book. She had found you so absorbed in it earlier in the day that you had not even been conscious of her presence.

"I assured Mr. Queerwitz that I believed he was on the wrong trail, but he insisted that a detective be sent to watch your actions. This was done, and that night the report delivered to this office was that you had visited an old second-hand book shop on Third Avenue; that from there you had mailed one book, and had then taken another to Mr. Van Loon, sold

it, and had delivered the money to the old bookseller.

"Our natural conclusion was that the stolen book was the one that you had sold, but when Mr. Van Loon was reached by telephone, he stated that the first of the volumes was the one that he had purchased for one thousand dollars.

"We said nothing of all this to Mr. Queerwitz, as we wished to see if the book that you had mailed was the one that had been taken from the antique shop.

It was not until the following noon that the book was delivered, and almost immediately afterward Mr. Van Loon appeared and purchased it for five hundred dollars during the absence of Mr. Queerwitz.

"We were then forced to conclude that the old bookseller on Third Avenue had been the thief, and we sent at once to his shop to have him arrested, only to discover that with his wife, Marlitta, he had sailed for Europe at daybreak.

"However, our detective reported that Miss Dolittle was at the shop, having all of the old books heaped upon a cart. Being truly puzzled by the case, I decided to follow it up myself, which I did, reaching the place in my closed car just as you were being

driven away on the book-laden truck. I followed, unobserved, and when you descended in front of the Pensinger mansion, with which place I am familiar, I decided that you lived there. To verify this I visited the grocer who has charge of the place.

"I made a few purchases and then said casually to the grocer: 'I see the old Pensinger mansion is occupied. People been there long?'

"Mr. Tenowitz, as I hoped, was garrulous and told me all he knew about the three Vandergrift girls who had taken possession of the place. He said the one answering to your description was called Roberta.

"Of course the grocer really knew little about you, but it was not hard for a detective to learn much more about a family that, for generations, has been so well known in New York. But there is one thing I do not understand, and that is your evident interest in that old second-hand dealer in books."

"I will tell you gladly," Roberta said, and she recounted the story from the moment when she had caught a first glimpse of the spray of lilacs, unconsciously telling him more than her words did of how touched her heart was by the poverty and sorrow that she was seeing for the first time.

When she paused, he looked thoughtfully out of the window. "I don't know that I ought to permit you to continue in this line of work," he said. "A girl brought up as you have been can know nothing, really, of the dangers that lurk everywhere in this great city."

"Oh, Mr. Jewett!" Bobs was eager, "please let me try just once more; then, if I fail again I will endeavor to find a profession for which I am better fitted."

"Very well, I will," was the smiling reply, "for this case cannot lead you into places that might be unwise for you to visit. In fact, I am sure that it is a case that will greatly interest a young girl."

Mr. Jewett paused to take a note book from his pocket. While he was scanning the pages Roberta leaned forward, waiting, almost breathlessly eager.

Mr. Jewett, glancing up from his note book, smiled to see Bobs' eager, interested expression. Then he told her about the case. "A certain Mrs. Waring-Winston, who is prominent in society, has a daughter who, although brought up in a convent, is determined to go upon the stage. Her mother has

tried every form of persuasion to prevent this unfortunate step, and at last she decided that a year of travel in Europe might have the desired effect, and she engaged passage upon a steamer which is to sail next week.

"Mrs. Waring-Winston believed that if she could interest the girl in other things just now, on their return to this country she might entirely abandon her determination to become a chorus girl. The mother assured me that Winnie, her daughter, is not talented enough to advance beyond that point.

"But the girl, it would seem, has more determination and self-will than she has talent, for when her mother informed her of the plans she had made, although outwardly seeming to acquiesce, she was inwardly rebellious as her subsequent actions proved, for that night she disappeared.

"Three days have passed and she has not returned. Mrs. Waring-Winston did not report the matter at once, believing that Winnie must have gone to stay with girl friends in the suburbs; but yesterday, having inquired at all possible places where her daughter might visit without having found a trace of her whereabouts, Mrs. Waring-Winston, in des-

peration, appealed to us, imploring us forever to keep the matter secret. We, of course, agreed to d. this, and it was then that I determined to send for y ., believing that a young girl could find Winnie sooner than one of our men."

"Do you think, Mr. Jewett, that the daughter of Mrs. Waring-Winston has joined a theatrical troupe in this city?" Bobs inquired.

"I think that it is more possible that she has joined a troupe that either has or soon will leave town to tour the country, but of course we must first visit the playhouses in the city. I have two other women working on the case, as I wish if possible to cover all of the theaters today. I have assigned to you a group of Broadway playhouses that you can easily visit during the matinee performances. Here is a photograph of the missing girl."

Roberta looked at the pictured face. "How lovely she is!" was her comment. "I do not wonder that her mother wants to protect her. How I do hope that I will be able to find Winnie and persuade her to wait, at least, until she is eighteen years of age before choosing a profession."

The girl rose. "It is one-thirty," she said. "Per-

haps I had better be starting. Do I have to have a pass or something of that sort in order to be admitted to the theaters?"

Mr. Jewett also rose and pinned a badge under the lapel of the girl's jacket. "Show that," he told her, "and it will be all the pass that you will need."

Then as he held open the door, he smilingly added, "Good luck to you, Miss Dolittle Vandergrift."

Bobs flashed a merry smile back at the young man. "I sincerely hope that I will do more than I did last time," she said, but, when she was seated in the taxi which was to take her to her destination on Broadway, her thoughts were not of the little would-be actress, but of Gwendolyn. Day after day Roberta had noted that, try as she might to be cheerful, her oldest sister, the one who had been Mother to them all, grew sadder and more troubled.

"Glow will not be really happy," Bobs was thinking, "until Gwen comes back to us. I cannot see where she can be, for she had only one month's allowance with her and she could not live long on that."

Bobs' reverie was suddenly interrupted by the stopping of the taxi, and, looking up, the girl found that they were in front of one of the festively

adorned theaters. With a rapidly beating heart, she descended to the walk, made her way through the throng, showed her badge and was admitted. At her request an usher led her behind the scenes.

Bobs felt as though she were on the brink of some momentous discovery.

CHAPTER XVII.

BOBS TRIES ACTING

When they were behind the scenes, a short, flashily attired man advanced to meet Roberta and the usher departed. For one panicky moment Bobs wondered whether she should tell that she was a detective. Would the director wish her to interfere with his plans, as she undoubtedly would be doing were she to take from him one of his chorus girls?

The alert little man, however, did not need to be told, for he had caught a glimpse of Roberta's badge when a projecting bit of scenery had for a moment pulled at her coat.

Rubbing his hands, and smiling ingratiatingly, he said in a voice of oily smoothness: "Is it one of our girls, ma'am, that you're wishing to see?"

Bob realized that he had guessed her mission and so she thought best to be perfectly frank with him

and tell the whole story. The little man seemed greatly relieved, and shook his head many times as he talked. "No such girl here," he assured her. "I'd turn her over to her Ma if there was. Come and see."

The small man spun around with the suddenness of a top, and Bobs could not help thinking that his build suggested the shape of that toy. Then he darted away, dodging the painted trees with great dexterity, leading the way down dark aisles among the scenes that were not to be used that day.

At last they reached the dressing rooms. "Look in all of 'em," he said. "Don't knock. Just walk in."

Then, with a flourish of his plump diamond-bedecked hands, which seemed to bestow upon her the freedom of the place, the small man gave another of his top-like spins and disappeared among the scenery.

Roberta found herself standing near a door on which was a large gilt star.

No need to go in there, she decided, for of course the girl whom she sought would not be the company's star, but since she had the open sesame of all the rooms, why not enter? She had always been

wild to go behind the scenes when she and her sisters had been seated in a box in this very theater.

Little had she dreamed in those days that now seemed so far in the past, that day would come when she would be behind the scenes in the role of an amateur detective.

As Roberta stood gazing at the closed door, she saw it open and a maid, dressed trimly in black and white, hurried out, leaving the door ajar.

Glancing in, Bobs saw a truly beautiful young woman lounging in a comfortable chair in front of a long mirror. The maid had evidently been arranging her hair. Several elaborate gowns were hanging about the room. Suddenly Roberta flushed, for she realized that a pair of darkly lashed eyes were observing her in the mirror. Then the beautiful face smiled and a slim white hand beckoned.

Entering the small dressing room, Roberta also smiled into the mirror. "Forgive me for gazing so rudely," she apologized, "but all my life I have wished that I might meet a real star."

The young woman turned and with a graceful yet indolent gesture bade Roberta be seated on a low chair that was facing her.

"Don't!" was all that she said, and the visitor thought that even that harsh word was like music, so deep and rich was the voice that uttered it.

Bobs was puzzled. She looked up inquiringly: "Don't what?" she asked.

The white hand rested on Roberta's knee as the voice continued kindly: "If you were my sister, I would say don't, *don't* take up the stage as a profession. It's such a weary, thankless life. Only a few of us reach the top, little girl, and it's such a hard grind. Too, if you want to live right, theatrical folk think you are queer and you don't win their friendship. They say you're not their kind."

"But, you—" Roberta breathed with very evident admiration, "you are a star. You do not need their friendship." She was thinking of the small florid man who had suggested a top.

The actress smiled, and then hurriedly added in a low voice, for the maid was returning: "I haven't time to talk more, now, but dear girl, even as a star I say *don't.*"

Bobs impulsively caught the frail hand and held it in a close clasp. She wondered why there were tears in the dark-lashed eyes. As she was closing

the door after her, she heard the maid address the star as Miss Merryheart.

"Another fictitious name that doesn't fit," Bobs thought. How she longed to go back to the little dressing room and ask Miss Merryheart if there was something, anything she could do for her; but instead, with a half sigh, she turned toward an open door beyond which she could hear laughter and joking.

Bob wondered if among those chorus girls she would find the one she sought.

The door to the larger room was ajar, and Roberta entered. As she had guessed, there was a bevy of girls in the room. A dozen mirrors lined the walls and before each of them stood a young girl applying paint or powder to her face, or adjusting a wig with long golden curls. Some of them were dressed in spangly tights and others in very short skirts that stood out stiffly.

This was unmistakably the chorus.

"Hello, sweetie," a buxom maiden near the door sang out when she observed the newcomer. "What line of talk are you goin' to give us? The last guy as was here asked us if our souls was saved. Is that the dope you've got up your sleeve?"

Roberta smiled so frankly that she seemed to disarm their fears that they were to be preached to. "I say," she began, as she sat on a trunk near the door, "do you all like this life?"

Another girl whirled about and, pausing in the process of applying a lip stick, she winked wisely at the one who had first spoken. "Say, Pink," she called. "I got'er spotted. She's an ink-slinger for some daily."

"Wrong you are," Bobs merrily replied. Then she turned to a slender girl who was standing at the mirror next to her, who had appeared quite indifferent to the newcomer's presence. "How is it with you?" Roberta asked her directly. "Do you like this life?"

But it was one of the bolder girls who replied: "Sure thing, we all like the life. It's great."

"Goin' to join the high kicks?" This question was asked by still another girl who, having completed her toilet, now sauntered up and stood directly in front of Bobs. For one moment the young detective's heart beat rapidly, for the newcomer's resemblance to the picture was striking, but another girl was saying: "Bee, there, has been with this here

show for two years, and she likes the life, don't you, Bee?"

So after all, this wasn't the one whom she sought.

Bobs decided to take them into her confidence. Smiling around in the winning way that she had, she began: "Girls, you've had three guesses and missed, so now I'll put you wise. I'm looking for a Winifred Waring-Winston, whose mamma-dear wishes to see her at once, if not sooner. Can you tell me at which theater I can find her?"

The others grouped about Roberta, but all shook their heads. "Dunno as I'd squeal on her if I did know," said the one called Pink. "But as it happens, I don't."

Nor did the others, it would seem, and when Roberta was convinced that Winnie was not to be found there, she left, but, as the curtain had raised on the first scene, she paused near the front door to hear Miss Merryheart sing. Truly she was an actress, Bobs thought, for no one in that vast audience who saw the star could have guessed that only a brief time before there had been tears in those dark-lashed eyes that now seemed to be brimming with mirth.

At the next theater she entered, Bobs had an unexpected and rather startling experience. Just as she appeared in the dimly lighted space back of the scenes, she was pounced upon by a man who was undoubtedly the stage manager.

"Miss Finefeather," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "What? You late again? Two minutes only to get into your riggin'." Then giving Bobs a shove toward an open door, he called hoarsely: "Here's that laggard, Stella. Help her and be quick. We don't want any hitches in this scene. No time for explainin'. That, an' settlin' accounts will come later," he added when Bobs tried to turn back to explain that she was *not* Miss Finefeather.

The man was gone and the leading chorus girl pounced upon her and, with the aid of two others, she was being disrobed. To her amusement as well as amazement, she soon found herself arrayed in tights with a short spangled overskirt. Resignedly she decided to see it through. Just at that moment a buzzer sounded, which seemed to be a signal for the entrance of the chorus. "Here you, Miss Finefeather," someone was saying, "can't you remember overnight where your place is? Just back of me, and do everything I do and you'll get through all

right." The voice was evidently intended to be kind.

Bobs followed the one ahead, trying to suppress an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh. Who in the world did they suppose her to be? she wondered. The girls had divided into two long lines and they entered the stage from opposite sides. Bobs was thinking, "I've heard folk say it's hard to get on the stage. Strikes me it's just the other way. I jolly wish, though, I had some idea what I'm supposed to do."

Roberta's reverie was interrupted by her kindly neighbor, who whispered: "Gimme your paw. Here's where we swing, an' don't forget to keep your feet going all the time. There's no standing still in this act."

Being in it, Bobs decided to try to do her best, and, having been a champion in school athletics, she was limber and mentally alert and went through the skipping and whirling and various gyrations almost as well as though she had been trained. However, when the act was finished and the chorus girls, with a burst of singing laughter, had run from the stage, the man whom she had first seen came up to her, profuse with apologies. He had just received a message telling him that Miss Finefeather was very

ill and wouldn't be able to keep on with the work. "You're a wonder," he exclaimed, with very sincere admiration. "How you went through that act and never missed so's one could notice it proves you're the girl for the place. Say you'd like it and the position's yours."

Bobs paused, but in that moment she seemed to hear Miss Merryheart's one word: "Don't!"

Roberta thanked the man, but said that her business engagements for that afternoon were so urgent that she could not even remain for another act.

Having learned that Miss Finefeather had been with them but a few days, Bobs, believing that she might be the girl whom she sought, asked for her address, and departed.

Her heart was filled with hope "I believe I've hit the right trail," she thought, as she hurried out of the theater.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHO WAS MISS FINEFEATHER

ROBERTA stepped into a drug store to inquire the way to the address that she had upon a slip of brown paper. The clerk happened to know the locality without referring to the directory, and Bobs was thanking him when one of the customers exclaimed in a voice that plainly expressed the speaker's great joy: "Bobsy Vandergrift, of all people! Where in the world are you girls living? Dick wrote me that you had left Long Island, but he failed to tell me where you had located?"

It was Kathryn De Laney who, as she talked, drew Bobs into a quiet booth. The girls seated themselves and clasped hands across the table.

"Oh, Kathy," Bobs said, her eyes glowing with the real pleasure that she felt, "I've been meaning

to look you up, for Gloria's sake, if for no other reason. I heard Glow say only the other day that she wanted to see you. I believe you'd do her worlds of good. You're so breezy and cheerful."

Kathryn looked troubled. "Why, is anything especially wrong with Glow?"

"She's brooding because Gwen doesn't write," Bobs said. Then she told briefly all that had happened: how Gwen had refused to come with the others to try to earn her living, and how instead she had departed without saying good-bye to them to visit her school friend, Eloise Rochester, and how letters, sent there by Gloria, had been returned marked "Whereabouts unknown."

"I honestly believe that Gloria thinks of nothing else. I've watched her when she was pretending to read, and she doesn't turn a page by the hour. I had just about made up my mind to put an advertisement of some kind in the paper. Not that I'm crazy about Gwen myself. There's no excuse for one sister being so superlatively selfish and disagreeable as she is, but Gloria believes, she honestly does, that if we are patient and loving, Gwen will change in time, because after all she is our mother's daughter."

"Gloria is right," was the quiet answer. "I am sure of that. You all helped to spoil Gwen when she was a child because she was frail. Then later you let her have her own way because you dreaded her temper spells, but I honestly believe that a few hard knocks will do much toward readjusting Gwendolyn's outlook upon life."

"But, Kathryn!" Bobs exclaimed, "Don't you know that Gwen couldn't stand hard knocks? If it were a case of sink or swim, Gwen would just give up and sink."

"I'm not so sure," the girl who had been next door neighbor to the Vandergrifts all her life replied. "It's an instinct with all of us to at least try to keep our heads above water." Then she added: "But didn't I hear you asking the clerk about an address? That was what first attracted my attention to you, because it is the same locality as my destination. I'm visiting nurse now on the lower West Side."

Then, after glancing at the slip of paper Bobs held up, Kathryn continued: "I'll call a taxi, and while we are riding down there you can tell me all about yourself."

When they were settled for the long ride, Bobs blurted out: "Say, Kathy, before I begin, please tell me why you've taken up nursing? A girl with a thousand dollars a month income hardly needs the salary derived from such service, and, of course, I know that you take none. Phyl said she thought you ought to be examined by a lunacy board."

Kathryn laughed good-naturedly as she replied: "Oh, Phyl means all right. She does think I'm crazy, but honestly, Bobsy, anyone who lives the idle, selfish butterfly life that Phyllis does is worse than not sane, I think; but she will wake up as Gwen will, some day, and see the worthlessness of it all. Now tell me about yourself. Why are you bound for the lower West Side?"

Bobs told her story. How Kathryn laughed. "A Vandergrift a detective!" she exclaimed. "What would that stately old grandfather of yours have to say if he knew it?"

Roberta's eyes twinkled. "Just about the same thing that he would say about aircraft or radio. Impossible!"

The recounting of their recent experiences had

occupied so much time that, as its conclusion was reached, so too was Bobs' destination.

"I'll get out with you, if you don't mind," Kathryn said, "for, since Miss Finefeather is ill, I may at least be able to give her some advice that will help her."

Roberta glanced gratefully at her friend. "I had hoped that you would want to come with me," she said, "but I did not like to ask, knowing that your own mission might be imperative."

"No, it is not." Then, having dismissed the taxi driver, Kathryn said: "I know this building. It is where a large number of poor struggling artists have rooms. On each floor there is one community kitchen."

A janitor appeared from the basement at their ring. She said that Miss Finefeather lived on the very top floor and that the young ladies might go right up, and she did hope that they would be on time.

"On time for what?" Kathryn paused to inquire. The woman gave an indifferent shrug.

"Oh," she informed them, "ever so often one of the artists gets discouraged, and then she happens

to remember that the river isn't so very far away. Also they just go to sleep sometimes." Another shrug, and, with the added remark that she didn't blame them much, the woman returned to her dreary home.

Bobs shuddered. What if they were too late? Poor Miss Finefeather, if she were really Winnie Waring-Winston, as Roberta so hoped, would not need be discouraged when she had a fine home and a mother whose only interest in life was to find her.

They were half-way up the long, steep flight of stairs leading to the top floor when Bobs paused and looked back at her friend, as she said: "I'm almost afraid that this girl cannot be the one I am seeking. Winnie could not be discouraged in only three days."

"I thought that at once," Kathryn replied, "but she is someone in trouble, and so I must go to her and see if I can help."

In silence they continued to climb to the top floor, which was divided into four small rooms. Three of the doors were locked, but the fourth opened at their touch, revealing a room so dark that, at first, they could only see the form of the bed, and were relieved to note that someone was lying upon it.

But at their entrance there was no movement from the silent figure.

"Maybe—after all—we came too late," Bobs said softly. and how her heart ached for the poor girl lying there, and she wondered who it might be.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOST IS FOUND

KATHRYN crossed to the one window and drew up the shade. It was late afternoon and almost dusk on that north side of the house. The dim light revealed on the pillow a face so still and white that Bobs was sure only death could make it so. For one long moment she gazed before she recognized the girl lying on the bed, and no wonder, for great was the change in her.

"Gwen! It's our own Sister Gwen!" she cried as one who can scarcely believe the evidence of her senses.

Down by the bedside Roberta knelt and took one of the lifeless white hands in her own. "Oh, Gwen," she implored, "why did you do it? You thought we didn't want you. You believed that in all the world there was no one who loved you, no home in which

you were welcome. Oh, how selfish I've been! Gwen, forgive me, Sister. I should have tried to help you. I was the one really who was selfish, for I wanted adventure. I didn't try to think what it would mean to you; but O, I will, I will, Gwen, if only you will live. Why don't you open your eyes, Gwen?"

Then, as there was no response from the apparently lifeless form on the bed, Bobs looked up at her friend as she implored: "Kathryn, why doesn't Gwen open her eyes? Are we too late. O, don't say that we are. It will kill Glow. She thinks that it is her fault that Gwen left. She feels that she turned one of Mother's own daughters out of our home."

Kathryn, who had been hunting about the room as though in search of something, as indeed she had been, gave an exclamation of relief and, going to Bobs, she held out a small vial. "Gwen isn't dead," she said. "It wasn't poison that she took. Just a heavy dose of sleeping powder. However, she will probably continue in this deathlike sleep for hours, and yet she may soon recover. We have no time to delay. I will remain here while you go to the corner drug store and telephone to my hospital for an ambulance. Just say that it is for Miss De Laney and

they will respond at once. While she is unable to protest, we will take her to your home."

Bobs had arisen, but lovingly she stooped and kissed the white face that was so unlike the proud, beautiful one she had last seen on that never-to-be-forgotten day when they had planned leaving their Long Island home.

Tears fell unheeded as Roberta whispered to ears that could not hear: "And when you waken, Sister dear, you will be in a home that wants you, and our Gloria, who has tried to be Mother to us all these years will be at your side smiling down, and a new life will begin for you and for us all."

Then, almost blinded by her tears, Roberta descended the long, dark flight of stairs and telephoned not only to the hospital, but also to Gloria, telling her the wonderful news and bidding her prepare Bobs' own room for the sister who was coming home.

Two hours later Gwendolyn, who had not awakened, was lying in the comfortable bed in Bobs' room. Her three sisters and their friend, Kathryn De Laney, stood watching her in the shaded lamplight. The expression on the face of Gloria told more than words could have done what it meant to

her to have this one of her dear mother's daughters back in the home.

"And a real home it is going to be to her from now on if patient love can make it so," Gloria said. Then to the nurse she turned, asking, "Will it be long before she wakens, Kathryn?"

"It ought not to be long," was the reply, which had hardly been given when Roberta whispered eagerly, "Glow, I think Gwen moved."

The eyes that looked so wearily out at them were about to close as though nothing mattered, when suddenly they were again opened with a brightening expression, and yet they did not look quite natural.

Holding out her arms toward the oldest sister, the girl on the bed cried eagerly: "Mother, I have come to you after all. I took something. I wanted to come——" Her voice trailed away and again she closed her eyes.

Gloria was the one of the girls who looked most like their mother. "Dear, dear Sister," Glow said, trying not to sob, "you are home again. I am sure that our mother led us to you. Try to get strong. We will help you, Gwendolyn, for truly we love you. No one knows, little Gwen, how your big sister has wanted you. Can't you try to forgive me for having

spoken impatiently, if not for my sake, at least for the sake of our mother?"

Gwendolyn looked at the face bent close above her as though trying to recall the past. Then, reaching out a frail hand, she said, "I, Glow, am the one who should be forgiven."

Then she closed her eyes, and a moment later Kathryn said that she was asleep, but that this time it was a natural sleep from great weariness.

"When she wakens again, give her broth, for I fear she is too nearly starved to take heavier food just now."

CHAPTER XX.

A FAILURE THAT WAS SUCCESS

THE day following that on which Gwen had been found, Detective Bobs had gone early in the morning to report at the Fourth Avenue Branch of the Burns Agency.

"Mr. Jewett," she began at once, "as a detective I certainly am a failure."

The young man laughed. "I'll agree with you that in one way, you certainly are, but nevertheless you accomplished your mission."

Bobs' expression of blank surprise seemed to delight her employer. "But, Mr. Jewett, what can you mean? It was my sister whom I found. I did not find Miss Winston-Waring."

"Yes you did, and you talked with her, or to her, rather."

"Well, I'll be flabbergasted!" Then Bobs apolo-

gized. "Pardon my lingo, Mr. Jewett. Our gardener's boy used to say that when he was greatly astonished, and I certainly never was more so. When, in the name of mystery, did I talk to that young lady, and where?"

"It was at the first theater that you visited. Miss Winifred said that you came into the dressing room and that after two of the girls, called Pink and Bee, had talked with you awhile, you turned to her, for her mirror was nearest you, and asked her directly if she liked the life of a chorus girl. She did not know how to reply, for the truth was that her three days' experience on the stage had greatly disillusioned her. She had found the rough ways of the girls repellant to her refined, sensitive nature, and she was afraid of the stage manager, whose criticisms were sarcastic and even unkind.

"While she was hesitating, Bee, it seems, had replied for her, and then it was that you had explained your mission. She, of course, had not given her real name, and so no one suspected that she was Miss Winifred Waring-Winston.

"Her pride alone kept her from following you and confessing her identity. She had declared to her mother that she would live her own life in her

own way, and she could not bear to acknowledge her defeat. Too, there was one bright spot in her new profession, which was that the star, Miss Merryheart, had singled her out and was very kind to her.

"That same afternoon, it seems, after the matinee," Mr. Jewett continued, "Miss Merryheart sent for her to come to her dressing room. The others were jealous and said things that were so unkind and untrue that the sensitive girl was almost in tears when she reached the room of the star.

"When the door had been closed and they were alone, Miss Merryheart placed kindly hands on her shoulders and looked deep into the tear-brimmed eyes. 'Dear little girl,' she said, 'why didn't you tell our visitor that you are Winifred Waring-Winston?' "

Of course the girl was amazed and greatly puzzled, for she had told Miss Merryheart nothing at all concerning her past or her identity, and so she asked her how she had known.

"The star replied: 'I have been long on the stage and I know when a girl has been brought up in an environment different from the others. Too, I saw last night that you were greatly disillusioned, and I realized by the frightened, anxious glances that

you cast about the audience that you feared someone might be there who would recognize you in spite of your disguise, and when our visitor today told me that in this city there was a home made desolate, a mother heart breaking because a little girl had run away to go on the stage, why shouldn't I guess that you are the one?'

"Then she added: 'Tell me your telephone number, dear.'

"And that," Mr. Jewett concluded, "is how it chanced that an hour later Winifred was restored to the arms of her mother, who at once canceled her passage for Europe, as a year abroad would not be needed to disillusion the little would-be actress."

"That wonderful Miss Merryheart!" Bobs said irrelevantly, "I love her and I want to know her better."

Mr. Jewett smiled, "Miss Vandergrift, as you say, you are not exactly a successful detective, and yet, in both of the cases on which you have been engaged you have accomplished what might be called indirect success. For, even though you did help him to escape, you discovered the thief of the rare old book, and you have been instrumental in restoring a lost girl to her mother. Now, I have another case

and one quite different for you. Do you wish to take it?"

Bobs laughed. "Mr. Jewett," she said, "like Winnie, I fear that I, too, am disillusioned. I find that a detective is not allowed to have sympathy. Honestly, if my life had depended upon it, I couldn't have turned that old man over to justice; but what is the new case?"

Roberta could not believe that she was hearing aright when he told her.

"Mr. Jewett," she exclaimed, "will you kindly say that over again?"

The young man was finding his new assistant refreshingly different.

"I merely stated that I would like you to help us find the heir to the Pensinger Mansion, who—" he paused and snapped his fingers. "I declare," he ejaculated, "I had quite forgotten for the moment that is your present home. All the better, for there may be some important evidence right on the premises. Come into my office and I will read all the data that we have filed up to the present."

Very much interested, Roberta followed the young man, wondering what she was to hear.

When they were seated, Mr. Jewett said: "Per-

haps you know something of the story of the Pensinger family?"

Roberta replied that she did; that a neighbor, Miss Selenski, had told about the lost daughter, Marilyn, and about her father's strange will.

"There is little more known by anyone," Mr. Jewett said. "Judge Caldwaller-Cory, whose father was Mr. Pensinger's legal advisor and close friend, is very eager to find the heir before it is too late. Not many years remain before the property, according to the will, is to be sold, the money to be devoted to charity. Judge Cory declares that it haunts him, sometimes, as the old house is supposed to be haunted. He feels sure that Marilyn is not living, but she might have children, somewhere, who are in need. The judge never accepted the theory which some held, that the beautiful girl leaped into the East River on the night that her shawl was found on the bank. He believes that she was secretly married and that, with her lover-husband, she departed for his home country, Hungary." Roberta nodded. "O, I do hope so!" she exclaimed so eagerly that Mr. Jewett smiled. But what he said was: "And so now, once again, the case is to be reopened, and, as the judge himself is very busy, he has turned the

matter over to his son, who has recently become junior member of his father's firm. Ralph Caldwaller-Cory is young and filled with fresh enthusiasms, and it is *his* wish that we put on the case a girl of about the age that Marilyn was at the time, if we have one in our employ. Since you had not notified me that you had ceased to be one of us, I told him that I would procure just the type of person whom I believed best fitted to assist us. Are you willing to undertake this case, Miss Vandergrift?"

Bobs smiled when she heard the name. "Gladly," she said, rising, "and *this time* I hope I will not *do little.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW ARRIVAL

When Roberta reached home that day, she began to sniff, for the house seemed to be pervaded with a most delicious aroma.

"Ohee. fried chicken, if I guess aright!" she thought. The front room being vacant, she skipped down the long, wide hall and pounced into the sunny combination kitchen and dining-room. Lena May smiled over her shoulder to greet the newcomer. She was busy at the stove preparing the noon meal. Gwendolyn, made comfortable on a pillowed reclining chair, was lying in the sunshine near the blossoming window-box. She also smiled, though she was too weak and weary to speak. Bobs kissed her tenderly and then inquired: "Say, Lena May, why all this festiveness? It isn't anyone's birthday, is it?"

"You know it isn't," their youngest replied as she stopped to open the oven door, revealing a tin of biscuits that were browning within. Then, rising, she added: "But, nevertheless, we are celebrating. You see, Nurse Kathryn ordered chicken broth for Gwen and, having made that, I decided to fry the remaining pieces because we are going to have company for lunch."

"Who, pray?" Bobs was removing her hat and coat as she spoke. Just then Gloria came in from the Settlement House and she inquired as she glanced about: "Hasn't the company come?"

"Not yet." Lena May looked at the old grandfather clock. "It lacks two minutes of being noon. They will be here promptly at twelve."

"I do believe that you are all trying to arouse my curiosity," Bobs said. "Well, the deed is done, so fire ahead and tell me who is to be the victim?"

"Victim, indeed." Lena May tossed her curly head with pretended indignation. "I have nine minds not to give you a single piece of this delicious fried chicken because of that—that——"

Bobs helped her out. "Slam on, your cooking is what you really mean, but of course you can't use

slang, not even in a pinch. But, I say, is our honored guest fine or superfine?"

Gloria and Lena May exchanged amused glances. It was the former who replied: "The guest of honor is to be a young gentleman, and, as to his identity, you may have three guesses."

This had always been their method of telling each other interesting news.

"Dick De Laney isn't in town, is he?" Roberta inquired in so matter-of-fact and little interested a manner that again Gloria realized that her sister did not greatly care for the lad who had loved her since the pinafore days.

"Not that I've heard of," Lena May said. "Now you may guess again." But before this could be done, the heavy knocker on the front door was announcing the arrival of someone, and Gloria went to answer its summons.

Bobs skipped over to the stove as she said hurriedly, "Tell me quickly who is coming, so that I may be prepared."

"Nell Wiggin and her brother Dean," was the whispered reply. "He came in on the eleven-ten train. Nell went to meet him and I told her to bring

him over here to lunch. I thought it would be pleasant for both of them."

"You're a trump," Bobs began, but paused, for Gloria was opening the door, saying, "Sisters, here are Nell and her brother Dean." Then to the tall, pale lad with the dreamy eyes she added: "This sister is Gwendolyn, who has been ill, and this is Lena May, fork in hand, symbolizing the fact that she is also our housekeeper. Roberta we call Bobs, for every family has need of a boy and Bobsy has always done her best to fill the requirements."

The lad, unused to girls, acknowledged these introductions rather shyly. Bobs, knowing that he was conscious of his muscle-bound left arm, which he could not move, said at once in her merry, nonsensical manner: "If so many sisters won't frighten you, Dean, I'll retire from the role of brother and let you fill it." Then she added, "I'm not going to call you Mr. Wiggin. It is too formal."

The lad flushed in his effort to reply, but Lena May saved him from further embarrassment by saying, "Nell, you and your brother may sit on either side of Gloria. Bobsy, will you serve the chicken? Gwen had her broth at eleven, so she isn't hungry just now."

Realizing that the lad who had lived only on remote New England farms would rather listen than talk, Bobs monopolized the conversation in her usual breezy manner, and often when she glanced his way she noted that the soft brown eyes of the lad were smiling as though he were much amused. But after lunch she spoke to him directly. Dean," she said, "your sister tells me that you love books."

"Indeed I do," the boy replied, "but I have seen very few and have owned only one."

"My goodness!" Bobs exclaimed. "Come with me and I will show you several hundred."

"Several hundred books," the lad gasped, quite forgetting his self-consciousness in his astonishment at this amazing remark.

Bobs nodded mysteriously as she led the way to the room overhead, where in the dim light Dean beheld old books in dusty piles everywhere about.

There was a sudden glow of pleasure in the eyes of the boy which told Bobs that he was indeed a booklover. "What a treat this will be," he exclaimed, "if I may browse up here when I wish." Then he added as a new thought presented itself: "But, Miss Roberta, I must not spend my time in idle reading. I want to find some way to earn money." Eagerly,

anxiously, his eyes turned toward her. "Can you suggest anything that I might be able to do?"

For one panicky moment Bobs' thoughts groped wildly for some profession that a one-armed lad might follow, then she had what she believed was a wonderful inspiration, and she said with her usual head-long impulsiveness: "I do, indeed, know just the very thing. You and I will start an old book shop and you may be manager."

The lad's pale face flushed with pleasure. "Do you really mean it, Miss Vandergrift?" he asked eagerly. "How I would like that."

In her characteristic manner Bobs wanted to settle the matter at once, and so she tripped downstairs with Dean following.

She found that Gwendolyn had gone back to bed and that the kitchen having been tidied, the three girls were sitting about the fireplace talking softly together. When they heard Bobs' inspiration, they all thought it a splendid plan, and Nell said that there was a vacant room adjoining the office of the model tenement that she had been told she might use in any way that she wished. As there was a door opening upon the street, she believed it would be an ideal place for an old book shop.

Rising, Nell continued: "I will telephone Mrs. Doran-Ashley at once to be sure that she is still willing that I use the room as I desire."

"This was done, and that most kindly woman in her beautiful home on Riverside Drive listened with interest to the plan and gave the permission that was requested. Moreover, upon leaving the telephone she made a note in her engagement book: "At the next board meeting suggest that a visit be made to the old book shop in the model tenement."

When Nell returned with the information that they might do as they wished with the room, Bobs and Dean went at once to a lumber yard near the docks and ordered the shelves they would need. An hour later Antovich and several of his boy companions had carried the old books from the Pensinger mansion and had heaped them upon the floor of the pleasant vacant room, which opened directly upon the sidewalk on Seventy-eighth Street.

When Bobs left, Dean was busy with hammer and nails and happier, perhaps, than he had been in the twenty years of his life.

CHAPTER XXII.

A CASE FOR TWO

As Bobs left the small shop, she glanced at her watch, and finding that it was nearly four, she hastened her steps, recalling that that was the hour when she might expect a call from the young lawyer. As she turned the corner at the East River, she saw a small, smart-looking auto drawing up at the curb in front of the Pensinger mansion, and from it leaped a fashionably groomed young man. Truly an unusual sight in that part of New York's East Side, where the clothes, ill-fitting even at best, descended from father to son, often made smaller by merely being haggled off at arm and ankle. No wonder that Ralph Cadwaller-Cory was the object of many an admiring glance from the dark eyes of the young Hungarian women who, with gayly colored shawls over their heads, at that moment were pass-

ing on their way to the tobacco factory; but Ralph was quite unconscious of their scrutiny, for, having seen Bobs approaching, he hastened to meet her, hat in hand, his good-looking, clean-shaven face glowing with anticipation.

"Have you found a clue as yet, Miss Vandergrift?" he asked eagerly, when greetings had been exchanged.

Roberta laughed. "No, and I'll have to confess that I haven't given the matter a moment's thought since we parted three hours ago."

"Is that all it has been? To me it has seemed three centuries." The boy said this so sincerely that Roberta believed that he must be greatly interested in the Pensinger mystery. It did not enter her remotest thought that he might also be interested in her. Having reached the mansion, Bobs led the way up the wide stone steps, saying: "I do hope Gloria and Lena May are at home. I want my sisters to meet you."

But no one was to be seen. Gwen was still in her room, while the other girls had not returned from the Settlement House.

"Well, there's another time coming." Bobs flashed

a smile at her companion, then led the way to the wide fireplace, where comfortable chairs awaited them, and they seated themselves facing the still burning embers.

"I say, Miss Vandergrift," Ralph began, "you're a girl and you ought to know better than I just what another girl, even though she lived seventy-five years ago, would do under the circumstances with which we are both familiar. If you loved a man, of whom your mother did not approve, would you really drown yourself, or would you marry him and permit your parents to believe that you were dead?"

Bobs sat so long gazing into the fire that the lad, earnestly watching her, wondered at her deep thought.

At last she spoke. "I couldn't have hurt my mother that way," she said, and there were tears in the hazel eyes that were lifted to her companion. "I would have known that her dearest desire would be for my ultimate happiness."

"But mothers are different, we will have to confess," the lad declared. "Marilyn's may have thought only of social fitness." Then, as he glanced about

Then, as she rose, she added: "You will like Mr. Hardinian. He has such beautiful eyes."

Ralph laughed as he also arose. "Is that a girl's reason for liking a man?" he inquired. Then he added, "Would I were a Hungarian that I might have interesting eyes. As it is, mine are the plain, unromantic American variety."

Roberta smiled at her new friend, but what she said showed that her thought was far from the subject: "Before we go, I want to be sure that my sister, Gwen, is comfortable."

Gwendolyn was sleeping so quietly that Roberta believed she would not awaken before Lena May's return, and so, beckoning the lad to follow, she left the house, closing the door softly. Ralph turned and looked back at the upper windows of the rooms that were not occupied, as he inquired: "Do you have a hunch that the old mansion holds the clue we are seeking?"

Roberta's reply was: "Only the ghost of Marilyn knows."

When the two partner-detectives were in the small, luxurious car, and going very slowly, because of the congested traffic down First Avenue, Ralph said:

"Tell me a little about your sisters and yourself that I may feel better acquainted." And so, briefly, Roberta told the story of their coming to the East Side to live.

"I say, Miss Vandergrift, that certainly was hard luck, losing the fine old place that your family had supposed was its own for so many generations." Then the lad added with sincere admiration: "You girls certainly are trumps! I'm mighty glad I met you, and I hope you'll be glad, too, some day."

"Why, Mr. Caldwaller-Cory, I'm glad right this very moment," Roberta assured him in so impersonal a manner that the lad did not feel greatly flattered. Indeed, he was rather pleased that this was so. Being the son of a famous judge, possessed of good looks, charming manners and all the money he wished to spend, Ralph had been greatly sought after by the fond mothers of the girls in his set, if not by the maidens themselves, and it seemed rather an interesting change to meet a girl whose interest in him was not personal.

After a silent moment in which the lad's entire attention had been centered on extricating his small auto from a crush of trucks, vegetable-laden push-

carts and foreign pedestrians, he turned and smiled at his companion. "Let's turn over to Central Park now," he suggested. "It's a little round about, I'll agree, but it will be pleasanter riding."

It was decidedly out of their way, but a glance at her wrist watch assured Roberta that Lena May would have returned to be with Gwen by that time, and so she was in no especial hurry.

How beautiful the park seemed after the thronged noisy East Side with its mingled odors from tobacco, fish markets, and general squalor.

"There, now we can talk," Ralph said as he drove slowly along one of the winding avenues under a canopy formed by wide-spreading trees. "What shall it be about?"

"You," Roberta replied. "Tell me about yourself."

"There isn't much to tell," the lad began. "My brother Desmond and I grew up in a happy home. During the winter months we attended a boys' school up the Hudson, and each summer vacation we traveled with our parents. We have been about everywhere, I do believe. Desmond and I were all in all to each other. We were twins. Perhaps that was

why we seemed to love each other even more than brothers usually do. I did not feel the need of any other boy companion, and when at last we entered college we were permitted to be roommates. In our Sphomore year, Desmond died, and I didn't much care what happened after that. It seemed as though I never could room with another chap; but at last the dormitories were so crowded that I had to take a fellow in. That was two years ago, and today Dick De Laney is as close to me as Desmond was, almost, not quite, of course. No one will ever be that. But, I tell you, Miss Vandergrift, Dick is a fine chap, clear through to the core. I'd bank on Dick's doing the honorable thing, come what might. I'm a year older than he is, and he won't finish until June, then he's coming on here to little old New York and spend a month with me. I say, Miss Vandergrift, I'd like to have you meet him."

Roberta smiled. "I've been waiting for you to come to a period that I might tell you that Dick De Laney and I were playmates when we wore pinafores. You see, they were our next-door neighbors." Bobs said this in so matter-of-fact a tone that Ralph did not think for one moment that this could be the

girl his pal had once told him that he loved and hoped to win.

If only Ralph had realized this, much sorrow might have been saved for one of them.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PARTNER-DETECTIVES

It was five-thirty when the partner-detectives left the quiet park, where long shadows were lying on the grass and where birds were calling softly from one rustling tree to another.

"It seems like a different world, doesn't it?" Bobs said, as she smiled in her friendliest way at the lad at the wheel. She had felt a real tenderness for her companion since he had told her about Desmond, and she was glad that an old friend of hers had been a comfort to him.

"It does, indeed," he declared with a last glance back at the park. "I like trees better than I do many people. We have some wonderful old elms around our summer home in the Orange Hills. When my mother returns I shall ask her to invite you four girls to one of her week-ends, or to one that she will plan just for me, after Dick comes."

Then, as they were again on the thronged East Side, the lad said:

"Seventy-sixth Street, beyond Second, you said, didn't you?"

"Yes. There is the Boys' Club House just ahead," Roberta exclaimed. Then as they drew up at the curb, she added: "Good! The door is open and so Mr. Hardinian probably is here."

The young man whom they sought was still there, and as they entered the low wooden temporary structure which covered a vacant lot between two rickety old tenements, they saw him smiling down at a group of excited newsies, who were evidently relating to him some occurrence of their day.

He at once recognized Roberta and made his way toward her, while the boys to whom he had spoken a few words of dismissal departed through a side door, leaving the big room empty.

Bobs held out her hand as she said: "Mr. Hardinian, this is my friend, Mr. Caldwaller-Cory, and we have come, I do believe, on a wild goose chase."

Ralph at once liked the young man with the lithe, wiry build and the dark face that was so wonderfully expressive.

He looked to be about twenty-four years of age,

although he might have been even a year or two older. An amused smile accompanied his question: "Miss Vandergrift, am I the wild goose?"

The girl laughed. "That wasn't a very graceful way of stating our errand," she said, "so I will begin again. The truth of the matter is that Mr. Cory and I are amateur detectives."

Again Mr. Hardinian smiled, and, with a swinging gesture that seemed to include the entire place, he said: "Search where you will, but I doubt if you will detect here a hidden wild goose." Then, more seriously, he added: "Come, let us be seated in the library corner, for I am sure that your visit has some real purpose."

Mr. Hardinian listened to the story of the Pensinger mystery, which, as little was really known about it, took but a brief moment to tell. At its conclusion he said: "Did you think, Miss Vandergrift, that I might know something about all this? I truly do not. Although I was born in Hungary, while I was still an infant my parents went to England, where I was educated, and only last year the need of my own people brought me here where so many of them come, believing that they are to find freedom and fortune. But how soon they are dis-

illusioned, for they find poverty, suffering and conditions to which they are unused and with which they know not how to cope. Many of the older ones lose out and their children are left waifs all alone in this great city. I found when I reached here that they needed me most, the homeless boys who, many of them, slept huddled over some grating through which heat came, or in hallways crowded together for warmth, until they were told to move on. And so the first thing that I did was to rent this vacant lot and build a temporary wooden structure. Now with these walls lined with bunks, as you see, I can make many of the boys fairly comfortable at night."

"I say, Mr. Hardinian," Ralph exclaimed, "this is a splendid work that you are doing! I'm coming over some night soon, if I may. I want to see the place in full swing."

"Come whenever you wish," was the reply. And then, as Roberta had risen, the young men did also.

The girl smiled as she said: "Honestly, Mr. Hardinian, I knew in my bones that you would not be able to help us solve the mystery, but you were the only Hungarian with whom I had even the slightest speaking acquaintance, and so we thought that we

would tell you the story and, if you ever hear anything that might be a clue, let us know, won't you?"

"Indeed I will, and gladly. Good-bye! Come over Sunday afternoon at four, if you have no other plans. We have a little service then and the boys conduct it entirely."

When they were again in the small car, Ralph was enthusiastic. "I like that chap!" he exclaimed. "I wish detectives could plan to have things turn out the way an author can. If I had the say of it, I'd make Mr. Hardinian into a descendant of Marilyn Pensinger and then he could inherit all of that fortune and use it for his homeless waifs."

It was after six when the small car stopped in front of the Pensinger mansion, and Ralph declared that since he had a date with his dad, he could not stop to meet the other Vandergrift girls, as he greatly desired.

That night, when Ralph returned from an evening affair which he had attended with his father, he did not retire at once. Instead, he seated himself at his desk and for half an hour his pen scratched rapidly over a large sheet of white paper. He was writing a letter to Dick De Laney, his close-as-a-brother

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friend, telling him that at last the only girl in the world had appeared in his life.

"I always told you, old pal, that I'd know the girl who was meant for me the minute that I met her. But I do believe that she is going to be hard to win."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROMANCE BUDDING

Two WEEKS have passed since the evening upon which Bobs and her new friend, Ralph Caldwaller-Cory, drove together in Central Park and told each other briefly the story of their lives. It does not take interested young people long to become acquainted and these two had many opportunities to be together, for were they not solving the Pensinger mystery, and was it not of paramount importance that the poor defrauded heir of all those idle millions should be found and made happy with his rightful possessions? Of course no other motive prompted Ralph, the rising young lawyer, to seek the companionship of his detective-partner, not only daily but often, in the morning, afternoon and evening.

They had sought clues everywhere in the mansion, but the great old rooms had failed to reveal aught that was concealed. Too, they had long drives in

the little red car that its owner called "The Whizz," and these frequently took them far away from the thronged East Side along country roads where, quite undisturbed, they could talk over possible clues and plan ways to follow them.

And all this time Roberta really thought that Ralph's interest in her was impersonal, for the lad dreaded revealing his true feeling until she showed some even remote sign of being interested in him.

"If I tell Bobs that I care for her, it might queer the whole thing," was one thought suggested to him as he rode home alone one night through the quiet park. Another thought was more encouraging. It suggested, "But a girl's pride won't let her show that she cares. There is only one way to find out, and that is to ask." And still another assured him, "There is every reason why Roberta Vandergrift should be pleased. You, Ralph, have wealth and position, and can restore to her all that she has lost."

"Lots you know about Bobs," the lad blurted out as though someone really had spoken to him. "My opinion is that Roberta isn't really grown up enough as yet to think of love. She considers her boy friends more as brothers, and that's what they ought to be, first and foremost. I'll bide my time, but if

I do lose Bobs, it will be like losing Desmond all over again."

Meanwhile, although no progress had been made in solving the mystery, much progress was being made in other directions.

Gloria, with Bobs and Ralph, had attended a Sunday afternoon meeting of the Boys' Club and Mr. Hardinian had walked home with them and had remained for tea. He was very glad to have an opportunity to talk with a young woman whose interest in welfare work paralleled his own, especially as he had one rather wayward boy whom he believed needed mothering more than all else.

Gloria's heart indeed was touched when she heard the sad story that the young man had to tell, and she gladly offered to do what she could.

She invited the wayward boy to one of her game evenings at the Settlement House, and in teaching him to play honestly she not only won his ardent devotion but also saved him from being sent to the island reformatory for petty thievery.

After that Mr. Hardinian frequently called upon Gloria when he needed advice or help.

The little old book shop, during the eventful two

weeks, had started, or so it would seem, on a very successful business career.

Because of the little memorandum that she had made in her note book on the day that Nell Wiggin had first telephoned to her, Mrs. Doran-Ashley did tell the ladies who attended the next model tenement board meeting about the shop, and asked them to visit it, which they did, being sincerely interested in all that pertained to their venture. And not only did they buy books, but they left others to be sold on commission. One glance at the fine face of the lad who was bookseller made them realize that, crippled as he might be, he would not accept charity.

"How's business this hot day?" Bobs asked early one morning, as she poked her head in at the door. She was on her way down to the Fourth Avenue Branch of the Burns Detective Agency, where she went every day to do a few hours' secretarial work for Mr. Jewett.

"We had a splendid trade yesterday," the lad replied, as he looked up from the old book of poetry which he was reading. And yet, since he held a pencil, Bobs concluded that he was also writing verse as the inspiration came.

"How so?" she inquired.

"The shop had a visit from no less a personage than Mr. Van Loon, the millionaire book collector, of whom you told me. He bought several volumes that I hadn't supposed were worth a farthing, and what he paid for them will more than cover our expenses up to date. I wonder how he happened to know about this out-of-the-way shop?"

"Oh, I guess he goes nosing around after old books, sort of ferrets them out, like as not. Well, so long! I'm mighty glad our shop is financially on its feet."

As Bobs went on her way down the crowded First Avenue she smiled to herself, for it was she who had sent Mr. Van Loon a business-like letter announcing the opening of an old book shop, feeling sure that he would not miss an opportunity of seeing it if it held something that he might desire.

Fifteen minutes after her departure, Dean again heard the door open, and this time a dear little boy of three darted in and hid beneath a book-covered counter, peering out to whisper delightedly, "I'se hidin'! Miss May, her's arter me."

Almost immediately the pursuer, who was Lena May Vandergrift, appeared in the doorway. The young bookseller was on his feet at once and there

was a sudden light in the dreamy brown eyes that told its own story.

"Good morning, Dean," the girl said. "Have you seen Antony Wilovich? I told him to wait out in front for me so that he could escort me to the Settlement House this morning."

Dean smiled knowingly and replied, which was his part of the game: "Well, well, has that little scamp run away again somewhere, and hidden? I guess he doesn't love his Miss May or he wouldn't do that."

This always proved too much for the little fellow in hiding, and from under the counter he would dart, his arms extended. Then the girl, stopping, would catch him in a loving embrace. "I do so love Miss May," the child would protest. "I loves her next most to my muvver over dere." A chubby finger would point, or the golden head would nod, in the direction of the rickety tumble-down tenement across the way, the very one which Miss Selenski, the former agent of the model tenement, had called a "fire trap."

This little game of hide-and-seek took place every morning, for Lena May had promised the "muvver over dere," who was slowly dying of consumption,

that she would call for Tony, take him to the Settlement sandpile and return him safely at noon.

If this was a merry moment each day for little Tony, it was to Dean Wiggin much more. The sweet, sympathetic girl, in her pretty muslin dress and flower-wreathed hat, suggested to the lad from the country all that he most loved, the fragrance of blossoms, the song of birds, and the peace of the meadow-pool at noon time. When she was gone, with a friendly backward nod at the crippled bookseller, he would always read poetry or try to write one that would express what Lena May was to him, to little Tony, or to the invalid mother who trusted her with her one treasure.

And so that two weeks had raised the curtain upon three dreams, but one of them was to become a tragedy.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SUDDEN DEPARTURE

Time—A week later.

"HELLO, Bobs, is that you?" But it was Lena May who had answered an imperative ring at the telephone, and so she replied, "Oh, good morning, Mr. Caldwaller-Cory. No, I am not Roberta. I will call her."

A moment later Ralph knew that he was talking to the girl whom he loved.

"I say, Bobety," he exclaimed, "will you go for a drive with me right away this minute? Please say 'yes' (for she had hesitated), I have something of great importance to tell you."

"Honestly, I can't, Ralph," was the earnest reply. "I am going to give Lena May a holiday. She and Dean Wiggin are going to take little Tony Wilovich to Bronx Park and spend the day. The little fellow

is wild to see the monkeys and Lena May needs a day among the trees."

Her youngest sister was at her elbow whispering, "We can go some other time, dear, if there's something that you want to do."

But Roberta shook her head. There was a brief silence at the other end of the line, then the lad spoke again. "I say, Bobs, how are they going? On the L! That's what I thought. Suppose I get Dad's big car. We can take them out to the park and then on the way back you and I can have the visit I want. In fact I've *got* to see you, Bobs. It's terribly important to me. I'm all cut up about something that has happened and——"

Roberta knew by her friend's voice that something had occurred to trouble him greatly, and so she said: "Wait a moment, Ralph. I will talk it over with my sister."

Lena May thought the plan a good one and Ralph was told to be at the Pensinger mansion in one-half hour with the car and they would all be ready and waiting for him.

Lena May then departed to the rickety tenement to get the wee lad.

"Oh, Mrs. Wilovich," the girl said, as she looked

about the small, hot room. "How I do wish that you would go with us today. Don't you feel strong enough?"

"No, dearie, thanks though. The coughin' spell was harder'n usual this mornin'. 'Twas all as I could do to get Tony's breakfast. I'll be that happy knowin' as the little fellow's seein' the monkeys his heart's been set on ever since the picture posters was up on the fences."

Five minutes later the girl and the little boy were joined by the young bookseller on Seventy-eighth Street.

"Dean," Lena May said sadly, "I don't believe that Mrs. Wilovich will be with us one month from today."

"Nor do I," the lad replied; then he added, as he looked at the curly-headed three-year-old, who had darted ahead but who looked back, laughing at them, "What will become of Tony?"

"I'm going to keep him, somehow. Gloria has given her permission. I wanted to be sure that Sister thought my plan wise that I might know just what to say to the little mother when she speaks of it to me, as she will in time."

No wonder was it that the lad's unspoken love for

the girl took unto itself the qualities of adoration. "She is too sweet and too good to be loved by a useless man such as I am," he thought, and how he wished that his muscle-bound arm might be freed that he could work and fight the world for this angel of a girl. A surgeon had once told him that there was really nothing wrong with his arm. It had grown with the passing years, but was stiffened from long disuse.

Tony was wildly excited when he saw the big green car in which he was to ride for the first time in his short life, and he entertained them all with his chatter.

Roberta, sitting on the front seat with her friend, glanced often at his face and realized that, although he, too, joined in the laughter evoked by the baby's prattle, his thoughts were of a very serious nature, and she wondered what she was to hear when they two were alone.

She little dreamed that Ralph was to say something that would greatly affect her.

Dean, carrying the basket which was well filled with picnic refreshments, and Lena May leading the shining eyed three-year-old, waved back at the big

car as they entered the side gate of the woodsy Bronx Park.

Bobs smiled as the baby voice wafted to them, "Ohee, see funny cow!"

They were near the buffalo enclosure.

Then Ralph started the engine and slowly the car rolled along the little river and toward the country. Roberta, knowing that something was greatly troubling her friend, reached out a hand and laid it sympathetically upon his arm. Instantly his left hand closed over hers and his eyes turned toward her questioningly. "Bobs," he said, "you've been a trump of a friend to me. I'm not going to try to tell you just now what it means. It's another friend I want to talk about. Dick—Dick De Laney. You remember that I told you he has become almost as dear to me as a brother, since Desmond died. I was sure Dick would do anything for me. I had such faith in his loyalty, in his devoted friendship, but now he has done something I can't understand." Ralph paused and his companion saw that he was greatly affected. "Bobs, I'm taking this awfully hard. I——"

Roberta was amazed. What had her old pal, Dick De Laney, done to so hurt her new friend. "Why,

Ralph dear," she said, for he had turned away as though too overcome with emotion for the moment to go on with his story. "What has Dick done? I know that it is nothing disloyal or dishonorable. You don't know Dick as I do if you can doubt him for one moment. He would do what he believed was right, even if the consequences were to bring real suffering to him. He's been that way ever since he was a little fellow. You may take my word for it, Ralph, that whatever Dick has done, his motive is of the highest. Now tell me what has hurt you so deeply?"

"Well, it's this way," the lad began. "I've missed Dick terribly, more, of course, before I met you, but I have been looking eagerly forward to the month he was to spend with me in the Orange Hills. I didn't tell you that I expected him to arrive today. I wanted to surprise you, but instead I received a letter on the early morning mail and it informed me that, although the writer really did love me as though I were his brother, he thought it best not to visit me this summer; instead he had decided to travel abroad indefinitely and that he had engaged passage on a steamer that leaves Hoboken at noon today. What can it mean?"

The lad turned and was amazed at the expression in the face of the girl. "Why, Bobs," he blurted out, "can it be—do you care so much because Dick is going away."

"Oh, Ralph, of course I care. It's all my fault. I knew Dick loved me. I guess I've always known it, and last April, when he was home for the spring vacation, I promised him that—Oh, I don't remember just what I did promise, but I do know that I haven't written often of late, and I guess he thinks I don't care any more; and maybe that's why he's going away; but I do care, and, oh, Ralph, I can't let him go without telling him. I always meant to tell him when he came home from college. I thought we were too young to be really engaged until then. Dick has been so patient, waiting all these years, and loving me so truly and so loyally. Can't we stop him, or—at least can't we see him before he sails?"

The expression in the fine face of the lad at her side plainly told the struggle that was going on within his heart. So, after all, Dick De Laney had been as loyal as a brother. He was going away to give Ralph a clear field.

Well, it was Ralph's turn now to show the mettle he was made of. In a voice that might have be-

trayed his emotion if Roberta had not been so concerned with her own anxiety and regrets, he said:

"Of course, Bobs, we will try to reach the boat before it sails. We'll ferry over to the Jersey side and then we'll break the speed limit."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HAPPY REUNION

Dick De Laney was leaning over the railing of the big liner that was to take him away from the country that was home to him and from the girl he loved, whose happiness meant more to him than did his own, but, as he looked out over the choppy waters of the bay and toward the broad Atlantic he could see ahead of him nothing but years of loneliness.

Then it was that he heard a voice that was eagerly, tremulously calling his name. He whirled and beheld Roberta back of him, her hands outstretched. There were tears in her eyes as she said: "Dick, why did you do it? Why did you plan going away without saying good-bye? Even if you have changed your mind, even if you don't care for me any more, it isn't like you to just run away."

Dick's face, troubled at first, was radiant when

the full meaning of the words reached his consciousness.

"Bobs," he said, "why, Bobita, I thought you didn't care; that is, I thought maybe you loved Ralph, and so——"

"And so you were going away to let me have someone else, you dear old stupid! To think that I so nearly lost you just because I was so very sure that you loved me; that I never could lose you, and so I didn't write about it."

These two were holding each other's hands and looking deep into each other's eyes, entirely oblivious of their surroundings. Roberta continued:

"Dicky-boy, I've had my lesson, and when we are married, every day the first thing, instead of good morning, I am going to say I love you, which, after all, will mean the same thing."

"Married, Bobs! When are we to be married?"

The girl laughed at the lad's eagerness, but as many passengers were appearing on deck, she replied, demurely, "Sometime, of course, and live happily ever after."

It was hard for Dick not to shout, but, instead, he said:

"Come along, dear, and I'll cancel my passage,

and then I'll go home with you and tell you what all this means to me. I can't very well here." Then, as he glanced about, he inquired: "How did you get here, Bobs? Did you come alone?"

"No, Ralph brought me." Her conscience rebuked her, for she had completely forgotten the existence of her other friend. "He was as hurt as I was because you were going away without seeing him," she told Dick.

"Poor old Ralph," was all he said. "I certainly am sorry for him, but I suppose it can't be helped."

"Sorry for Ralph? Why?" Roberta's expression of surprised inquiry was so frank that the lad knew his pal had never spoken of his love.

Dick was even more puzzled when, upon reaching the dock, he saw his friend Ralph leap toward them with hands outstretched. Joyfully he exclaimed: "Great. I know by your radiant faces that you've made up. I congratulate you both. I certainly am glad that we made it on time." Then after a hearty hand-shaking: "What put that wild notion of flight into your head, old man? You can't get rid of us that easy, can he, Bobs? My detective-partner here has been telling me that she has been engaged to you

ever since she wore pinafores, or was it a little later?"

Roberta laughed. "I believe I had on a riding habit that day, didn't I, Dick?"

Ralph turned away after a fleeting glance at the girl's face as it was uplifted to his roommate. He had not dreamed that she could be as beautiful as that expression of love had made her.

Dick was replying, "Oh, it doesn't much matter when it happened, dear. The big thing is that it did happen at all."

Then, when they were in the big green car (the front seat was wide enough to hold all three of them), Dick began to ask questions.

"How is Gwen now?" was the first of them. He was pleased to hear that the girl, but a year Roberta's senior, was much better and visiting his sister, Phyllis.

Then it was that Bobs thought of something. "Why, Ralph," she said, "you never did have an opportunity to meet my beautiful sister, Gwendolyn, did you? She hasn't been strong enough to visit with strangers, and now she has gone away for a whole month."

Dick smiled as he said to the driver: "Bobs is

giving herself a compliment when she calls Gwendolyn beautiful, for the family resemblance between the two girls is very striking."

Roberta laughed. "I should say that it must be, Dick. Did I ever write you about the time a stage manager thought that I *was* Gwen, and I actually had to do a song and dance? I laugh every time I think of it. Gloria said afterwards that it was a natural mistake, for though I am not as sylph-like as my sister, we do look very much the same."

Ralph smiled, but he made no response. His thought was commenting: "As though anyone could be like you, Bobs."

It was noon when the Pensinger mansion was reached, and Roberta told the lads that she wasn't going to ask them in just then, as she had to do some writing for Mr. Jewett that must be delivered that afternoon, but she invited them both to supper, if they weren't afraid to eat her cooking. Dick said he certainly would reappear as soon as she would permit him to come, but Ralph had an engagement with his Dad. As that was not unusual, Bobs did not think that this time it was an excuse to remain away, as indeed it was.

Roberta turned at the house door to wave to the lads in the car that was starting away. Vaguely she wondered what they would talk about. How little she knew of the aching heart that one of them was so bravely trying to hide.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REVELATIONS THAT DO NOT REVEAL

THE two lads who were close as brothers rode for some time in silence after having left Roberta at the Pensinger mansion. It took skillful driving to cross the crowded streets at First, Second and Third, but after that the way was open to Central Park and, when at last they were riding down one of the wide, tree-shaded avenues, Ralph turned his gaze from the road and smiled at his friend.

The eyes of Dick were searching.

"And all this means what, to you?" he asked earnestly.

"That I wrote the letter to which you are referring, hastily, on an impulse, before I was really acquainted with Miss Vandergrift. I know now that she isn't the girl for me, and I also know that she *is* the girl for you, and I sincerely congratulate you both. Now I say, Dick, you aren't going to

spoil my plans for a house party in the Orange Hills by bolting, are you? Ma Mere will be back tomorrow, and she wrote that I might have my friends for a week as soon as the house has been aired out. You know it has been closed all winter."

"Indeed, I'm not going anywhere." Dick felt greatly relieved, for he believed that Ralph was telling him the truth. He knew that his college pal was impulsive and often did things in more of a headlong manner than he would had he given the matter thought. "Of course he admires my Bobs; no one could help that, but I'm glad that he doesn't really love her," Dick was thinking. "He's had sorrow enough as it is." Aloud he asked, "Who are you going to ask?"

"Well, I did invite all four of the Vandergrift girls, but Bobs is the only one who has accepted. The oldest and youngest sisters are free but a few hours each day; the rest of their time they devote to Settlement work and they feel that they are especially needed now that it is vacation in the schools. Gwendolyn, however, may come, as of course I have invited your sister Phyllis and her guests."

Dick looked at Ralph with the light of a new inspiration in his eyes. "I say, wouldn't it be great

if you could care for my sister Phyl? Then you would be my brother in very truth."

Ralph laughed. "Dicky-boy," he said, "are you turning matchmaker? It's too late for that, old man. Bobs tells me that Phyllis is engaged to a fine chap from up Boston way. His name is Arden Wentworth."

"Gee, that's great news! Arden is a chap after my own heart, but I didn't think that he ever could win Phyl. She must have changed a lot this last year."

"Why, how's that?" Ralph looked around inquiringly. "His father has piled up a few millions. That ought to please any girl."

"That's just where the shoe pinches, so to speak," was the reply. "Arden, being a red-blooded young American, refused to just spend his father's money and so he put on overalls and began at the bottom in one of his dad's factories. He said he wanted to prove to himself, even if the world didn't care, that he had brains enough to make good without help. Phyl wouldn't speak to him after that, hoping that, for her sake, he would give it up; but he didn't, and so I thought it was all off between them."

"Well, something must have happened, for Bobs

tells me that they are really engaged, and so, of course I have also invited Arden. By the way, you know Gwendolyn Vandergrift. What kind of a chap ought I to ask for her? Harry Birch is in town. I thought she might like him." And so the lads talked over the plans for the coming house party, and so successfully did Ralph play his part that his pal did not for one moment suspect that his friend was secretly wishing that he might have sailed away in Dick's place on the boat which, that noon, had left for distant shores.

But night is darkest before the dawn.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HOUSE PARTY

RALPH and Dick were out on the wide velvety lawn which surrounded the handsome rambling summer home of the Caldwaller-Corys.

The gay awnings, palms and boxes of flowers gave the house a festive appearance, while the many colored lanterns strung about the garden suggested that some merriment was planned for the evening.

Mrs. Caldwaller-Cory, who seemed very young to be the mother of a junior member of an ancient law firm, emerged from the house closely followed by Roberta Vandergrift.

Bobs, in an attractive summer dress and wide flower-wreathed hat, looked very different from the girl who, while on the East Side, dressed in a simple dark tailor-made suit and a neat, narrow-brimmed hat.

"Aren't your guests late, my son?" the hostess

inquired. Ralph looked at his watch for the tenth time in as many minutes.

"They certainly are," he replied, late by a full hour now, and I am almost inclined to think that they had a breakdown. They were coming in Jack Beardsley's tallyho, and he said he would time the drive from New York so that they would reach us promptly at two-thirty, and now it is nearing four."

Just at that moment a butler crossed the lawn and, beckoning Ralph to one side, told him that someone awaited him at the telephone. Excusing himself, the lad fairly ran indoors. As he had expected, it was the voice of his friend, Jack Beardsley, that greeted him. "I say, Ralph, are you alone so that no one will get wise to what I am going to say?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"We don't want to worry her sister needlessly. There really is no cause for that, but we've been delayed at the Orange Hills Inn because Gwendolyn Vandergrift, who isn't as strong as she thought, has found riding in the tallyho too hard. She's got grit, that girl has! Never complained, but kept up as long as she could that she need not trouble anyone until she just keeled over and fainted. She's better now, and Phyllis thought that if you would come

over after her with that little runabout of yours, made comfortable with blankets and pillows, it wouldn't be as hard for Miss Vandergrift as this old tallyho of mine. Mrs. Buscom, the innkeeper's wife, will look out for her, and so, if you are coming, we'll start along, as I want to make the steep grade with this lumbering vehicle of mine before dark."

"Sure thing, I'll get there all right. I'll take a short cut through the hills, so you won't pass me, but don't be alarmed. I'll probably get back here in The Whizz as soon as you do in the tallyho, so I won't say anything to her sister, Roberta, as yet. So long."

Again Ralph was acting on impulse. His first desire had been to take Bobs with him, but if he did there would not be room to make the invalid sister comfortable on the return trip, and, moreover, it wouldn't be fair to Dick.

His dad wouldn't arrive with the big car until five-thirty, and so The Whizz would have to do. Sending word out to the group on the lawn that the tallyho had been delayed but would soon arrive, Ralph donned his leather coat, cap and goggles and made his way out through a back entrance and down to the garage. Soon thereafter he was speeding over

a country road which led among the hills and was a short cut of many miles to the Inn. He broke the speed limit whenever the dirt road was smooth enough to permit him to do so, but, although he frightened many a flock of birds from the hedges, no one arose from the wayside tangle to bid him go more slowly.

When at last he drew up at the Inn, the kind Mrs. Buscom appeared and smilingly informed him that the young lady was quite rested and that the tallyho had been gone for half an hour. She was about to lead the way into the dim, old-fashioned parlor of the Inn when new arrivals delayed her, and so Ralph went in alone.

The blinds in the old-fashioned parlor of the Inn were drawn, and, having come in from the dazzling sunshine, Ralph at first could scarcely see, but a girl, who had been seated in a haircloth rocker, arose and advanced toward him. She wore a rose-colored linen hat and dress. For a moment the lad paused and stared as though at an apparition.

"Bobs!" he ejaculated. Then he laughed as he extended his hand. "Miss Vandergrift, honestly, just for a second I thought that I was seeing a vision. I had quite forgotten that you and your

sister so closely resemble each other, though, to be sure, you are taller than Bobs; but pardon me for not introducing myself. I am Ralph Cory, of whom, perhaps, you have heard."

"And I am Gwendolyn Vandergrift, of whom I am sure that you have heard, else you would not have come for me," the girl smiled; and, to his amazement, Ralph found that his heart was pounding like a trip-hammer. "If you are sure that you are rested, Miss Vandergrift," he said, "we will start back at once. I've brought soft pillows galore, and a jolly soft lap robe. I do hope you'll be comfortable."

On the porch of the Inn, Gwen turned and, holding out a frail hand, she said to the kindly woman: "Thank you, Mrs. Buscom, for having taken such good care of me. I shall stop again on our way back to town."

The bustling little woman helped arrange the pillows and tucked in the blanket. Then to Ralph she said as the machinery started: "Do take care of the pretty dear. It's like a flower she is, and ought to be sheltered from the rough winds of the world."

"I'll do that little thing, Mrs. Buscom. Good-bye. Wish us luck!"

Ralph drove slowly at first, but Gwen said, "I'm so well packed in pillows, Mr. Cory, it won't jar me in the least if you go faster." And so the speed increased. It was late afternoon and the highway was deserted. "I'd like to overtake the tallyho," Ralph remarked. "If I thought you wouldn't mind the pace we'd have to hit."

Gwendolyn smiled up trustingly. "I have perfect faith in your driving," she said. "I know you will take care of me."

Ralph, looking into the face of the girl at his side, again had the strange feeling that it was Bobs, only different, and—Oh, what was the matter with him, anyway? Was it possible that he liked the difference?

Bobs had always been a frank comrade, more like another boy, when he came to think of it, but this girl, who was equally beautiful, was depending upon him to take good care of her.

A fifteen-minute spurt brought them to the top of a hill and in the valley below they saw the tallyho.

Ralph stopped a brief moment on the plateau, leaped out to be sure that The Whizz was in perfect

condition, and then anxiously inquired, "Are you sure you're game? Loop the loop won't be in it."

Gwen nodded. "I'll like it," she assured him. The color had mounted to her cheeks and her eyes sparkled. "All right! Hold fast! Here goes!" Then The Whizz went like a red streak down that hill on which, as Ralph had observed from the top, there was nothing to impede their progress.

They overtook the tallyho and slowed up that they need not startle the horses. They had reached the outer boundaries of the Caldwaller-Cory estate.

"Suppose I get back in the tallyho with the others," Gwen said, "then Bobs won't know that I had a fainting spell. If she knew it, she would feel that she ought to take me right home, and I don't want to go." Her smile at Ralph seemed to imply that he was her fellow-conspirator.

"I'm not going to let you go," he heard himself saying.

So the change was made. Ralph turned The Whizz into a rear entrance, used only by delivery autos, and in that way reached the garage.

He had asked Jack Beardsley to give him time to get out on the lawn before he arrived, and so the

three, who were still seated around a tea table under a spreading oak, saw Ralph coming from the house at the same time that the tallyho entered the front gate.

They little dreamed of all that had happened.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRAGIC HOURS

And now while these young people are having a care-free, happy time in the beautiful Orange Hill country, let us return to the East Side that is sweltering in the heat of late June.

It was nine o'clock at night and the air was still breathlessly stifling. The playground that edged the East River was thronged with neighboring folk who had brought what portable bedding they had and who planned sleeping upon the ground out-of-doors to catch some possible breeze from over the water.

Many of these people were residents of the rickety tenement across from the model apartments, but one there was who had been unable to leave the small, hot room that she called home, and that one was Mrs. Wilovich.

She was not alone, nor had she been, for all that day Lena May had been at her bedside.

"She cannot last the night out," the visiting district nurse had said. "Hastn't she any own folks to stay with her till it's all over?"

"I shall stay," little Lena May had replied

"You? Do you think you ought? You're a mere girl. Aren't there some women in this house who'd do that much for a neighbor?"

"I am seventeen," was the quiet reply, "and Mrs. Wilovich would rather have me. She never made friends among the neighbors."

"Well, as you wish," the busy nurse had said. "I have many more places to visit this evening, so I can't stay; and, anyway, there's nothing to do but to let her——"

"Hush, please, don't say it. Little Tony might hear," Lena May had implored in a whisper as she glanced at the child curled up on the floor as though he were asleep.

When the nurse was gone, Dean Wiggin appeared in the open doorway, as he had many times that day and evening. Nell had been called to the country to see about the small farm which their foster-father had bequeathed them, or she would have been with Lena May. Gloria had left at eight to take her

evening classes at the Settlement, and had promised to return at ten and remain with her sister until the end.

The giant of a lad, with his helpless arm that was always held in one position as it had been in slings so long ago, glanced first at the woman in the bed, and then at the girl who advanced to him.

"Can't I stay now?" he spoke softly. "I've closed the shop and the office. Isn't there anything that I can do to help?"

"No, Dean, I don't need you, and there isn't room; but I do wish that you would take Tony out of doors. It is stifling here."

The little fellow seemed to hear his name. He rose and went to Dean. The lad lifted Tony with his strong right arm. "I'll take him down to the docks a while," he told the girl. "Put a light in the window if you want me."

Lena May said that she would. Then for a time the young girl stood in the open window watching the moving lights out on the river. At last she turned back and glanced at the bed. The mother lay so quiet and so white that Lena May believed that she had passed into the land where there is no

sweltering, crowded East Side. She was right. The tired soul had taken its flight. The girl was about to place the lamp in the window to recall Dean when she paused and listened. What a strange roaring sound she heard, and how intensely hot it was becoming. In another moment there was a wild cry of "Fire! Fire!" from the playground.

Lena May sprang to the open door. She knew there was but one fire escape and that at the extreme rear of the long, dark hallway. That very day she had noticed that it was piled high with rubbish. Then she must make her escape by the narrow, rickety front sairs. Down the top flight she ran, only to find that the flight beneath her was a seething mass of flame.

She darted back into the small room and closed the door. Then she ran to the open window and called for help, but the roaring of the flames drowned her voice. However, she was seen, and several firemen ran forward with a ladder, but a rear wall crashed in and they leaped back.

At that moment a lad darted up and pushed his way through the crowd. "Put the ladder up to that window," he commanded, pointing to where Lena May, pale and quiet, was still standing.

"By heck, we won't! It's sure death to climb up there. The wall's rocking even now. Stand back, everybody," the chief shouted; but one there was who did not obey. With superhuman effort he lifted the ladder. Several men seeing that he was determined helped him place it, then ran back, and left the lad to scale it alone. Never before had Dean so regretted his useless arm.

"God, give me strength!" he cried; then mounted the ladder. He could feel it sway. Flames leaped from the windows as he passed. He caught at the rounds with his left hand as well as his right, and up, up he went. The girl leaned far out. "Drop down. Hold to the window sill! I'll catch you," the lad called. Lena May did as she was told, and, clinging to the top round with his left hand, Dean clasped the girl's waist with his strong right arm and climbed down as fast as he could go. He did not realize that he was using his left arm. He had to, it was a matter of life and death. A pain like that made by a hot branding iron shot through his shoulder, but even this he did not know.

Firemen rushed forward and took the girl from him, and none too soon, for with a terrific roar the

fire burst through the roof, which caved in; then the wall tottered and crashed down about them.

"Where's that boy? The one that went up the ladder?" people were asking on all sides. Where was he, indeed?

CHAPTER XXX.

A HERO REWARDED

A WEEK later Lena May was in the sunny kitchen of the Pensinger mansion making broth. A curly-headed three-year-old boy was sitting on the floor playing contentedly with his toys. He had been told that his mother had gone to a beautiful country where she would be well and happy and that some day he would see her again.

"Muvver likes Tony to stay wiv you, Auntie May," he prattled as the girl stooped to kiss him. Then, as he suddenly reached up his chubby arms, he added: "Tony likes to stay wiv you."

"There, now, the broth's ready and Tony may help Auntie May," she told him. The little fellow was given a plate of crackers and the girl followed with a bowl of steaming refreshment. They went to Bobs' room, where a lad was lying in bed.

Once again Dean Wiggin had fought a fire for

the sake of a friend, but this time had undone the harm that had been done in the long ago. Even the surgeon who had been called in declared that the way the lad had wrenched his arm free and had actually used it was little less than a miracle; but, all through the ages, people who with a high purpose have called upon God for help, have received it, and that help has been named a miracle.

"See, Lena May," the lad said as he stretched out his left arm, "it moves, doesn't it? Stiffly, perhaps, but I must keep it going, the doctor told me." Then he drew himself into a sitting position and the girl raised the pillows to make him comfortable.

He smiled at her beamingly as he said: "Another bit of god news is that tomorrow I may get up. Just because one wall of a burning tenement fell on me is no reason why I should remain in bed longer than one week and be waited upon."

"You surely had a wonderful escape, Dean," the girl said as she gave him the broth. "Just by chance the firemen instantly turned the water where you had fallen and so you weren't burned."

"Nor drowned," the lad said merrily, "just knocked senseless." Then, after a moment's pause, he continued: "I want to be up and about before

Nell returns. She will be in about noon tomorrow. Unless it got into the New England papers, which isn't likely, she won't know a thing about it. I don't want her to hear of it before I tell her. She would imagine all sorts of things that aren't true, and be needlessly worried."

"How glad your sister will be when she finds that the use of your arm has been restored to you." Lena May sat by the bedside holding Tony on her lap.

"Won't she?" Dean's upward glance was radiant. "No longer will I have to follow the profession of old book-seller. I want to do something that will keep that arm constantly busy."

"What, Dean, have you thought?"

"Yes, indeed. You won't think it a very wonderful ambition. I want to be a farmer. I don't like this crowded city. I feel as though I can't breathe. When I am lying here alone, I keep thinking of the New England farm where my boyhood was spent, and I long to really work in that rocky soil, standing up now and then to breathe deep of that sparkling air and to gaze at that wide view over the meadow-lands, and the shining, curving silver ribbon, that is really a river, to the distant moun-

tains. Lena May, how I wish you could see it with me."

"I am sure that I would love it," the girl said, then, rising, she added: "Here comes Gloria and Mr. Hardinian. They are going to hear some Hungarian music tonight, and I promised to have an early supper for them. Tony may stay with you. I am sure he would like to hear a story about the little wild creatures who live on your farm."

But, when the girl was gone, the little fellow accommodatingly curled up by Dean's side and went to sleep, and so the lad's thoughts were left free to dream of a wonderful something that might happen some day on that far-away New England farm.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOUR ROMANCES

Time—Two weeks later.

Place—Kitchen of the Pensinger mansion.

Characters—Gloria, Gwendolyn, Roberta, Lena May and little Tony.

HAVEN'T things been happening with a whirl of late?" Bobs exclaimed as she passed a plate of hot muffins. "I feel dizzy, honestly I do! I'm so proud of Dick," she added as she sank into her own place at the table.

"All of his own accord he told me that he's going back for one more year at law school and then he and Ralph are going to hang out a shingle for themselves. They're going to start a new firm and be partners. Judge Caldwaller-Cory thinks that his son must be crazy, when he is already a junior member of an old and well established firm. They got

the idea from Arden Wentworth, I suppose. He has made good by himself, and the plan rather appeals to Dick and Ralph."

"They're great pals, aren't they, these two? Brothers couldn't care more for each other, I do believe," Lena May said, as she buttered a muffin for her little charge.

"And to think that they are to marry sisters in the dim and distant future. That ought to cement the brotherly ties even closer than ever," Gloria remarked, as she smiled at Gwendolyn, who, wind-browned and sun-rosy, looked as though she had never been ill.

"Gwen, you and Ralph fell in love rather suddenly, didn't you?" Lena May inquired.

"Maybe so," her sister replied. "Ralph says that he has always felt sure that he would know the girl who was meant for him the very moment that he saw her, and he insists that he loved me the minute he met me at Orange Hills Inn."

Roberta leaned over and placed her hand on that of her sister. "I'm so glad," she said, "for I do believe that Ralph is almost as fine a chap as my Dick, and that is saying a great deal; and to think

that if it hadn't been for the Pensinger mystery, we might never have met him."

"By the way," Gloria remarked, "what has become of the Pensinger mystery?"

Roberta laughed as she arose to replenish the muffin plate from the oven. "I'm afraid it is destined to always remain a mystery. Ralph and I followed every clue we could possibly think of. It's a shame, isn't it, not to have this old place owned by someone, to say nothing of the money."

After a moment's silence, Gloria asked: "Lena May, was there any news of general interest in Dean's letter this morning?"

Their youngest sister smiled brightly. "Oh, yes, indeed. He was so glad to get back to that New England farm where he can breathe. He said that there are wonderful possibilities in the old house and that he is going to begin work on it at once. He hopes that by the time I am eighteen, it will look like a real home; but there was another item in the letter that I am sure you will all be glad to hear. His group of nature poems has been accepted by a magazine called *The New England Homestead,* and the check they sent seems like

a real fortune to Dean. The best of it is, they have asked for more."

"Great! I for one shall be most proud to have a poet for a brother-in-law." Then to Lena May: "Maybe you thought you were keeping it a secret from us, little one, but you weren't, and we're glad, just as glad as we can be."

Their youngest, shining-eyed, looked up at the oldest sister, who sat at the head of the table, then she said: "Of course I had told Glow, because she is Mother to us, but after that letter from Dean this morning, I want to tell you all."

Then merrily Bobs exclaimed: "Now, Gloria, we've all 'fessed up but you. Aren't you and Mr. Hardinian going to be married some day and live happily ever after?"

"I never knew two people who seemed better suited for each other," Gwendolyn commented.

Gloria smiled. "And what would you have us live on, dear? You know that it takes Mr. Hardinian's entire income to pay the expenses of his Boys' Club. Of course the little chaps pay five cents a night for a bunk when they have work, but he has to loan money to others who are out of work, who might take to stealing if they had no other way to

procure food. However, they have never failed to pay him back when they did get work." Their oldest sister's enthusiastic praise of the welfare worker told how great was her admiration for that truly noble young man, if nothing more.

"Crickets, what was that?" Bobs suddenly exclaimed.

"Only the telephone, my dear," Lena May remarked. "Bobsy, will you answer it?"

Three minutes later that girl fairly plunged back into the kitchen, her shining eyes assuring them that she had heard something of an astonishing nature.

"It was Ralph," she exclaimed, as she sank down into the nearest chair. "The mystery is solved!"

"Solved?" her sisters repeated inquiringly and all at once. "How? When? Who is the heir?"

Roberta laughed. "Well, here's where I resign as a detective," she declared. "I've had three cases and although each one has been successfully solved in spite of me, it has not been because of any cleverness on my part."

"But, Bobs, do tell us what Ralph said. We're bursting with curiosity."

"My partner-detective feels as chagrined about it as I do, for the solution of the mystery just turned

up; we neither of us ferreted it out as we had hoped that we would."

"Bobita, you're just trying to tantalize us," Gwen declared. "Do tell us from the beginning."

"Very well then, I will. Ralph said that his dad happened to recall recently something which his father had once told him. You know it was Ralph's grandfather who was the intimate friend and legal advisor of Mr. Pensinger.

"It seems that a week before his death, Mr. Pensinger had sent some important papers and a letter to the office of Mr. Caldwaller-Cory, the grandfather, you understand. Just as he was about to examine them, he was called away on urgent business and he left the papers on his desk, expecting to return soon. The Cory building was even then in the process of construction, but Ralph's grandfather had moved in before it was quite completed.

"That day the floor was being put down in the room adjoining the small office. Later, when Mr. Caldwaller-Cory returned, his mind was so filled with the intricacies of the new case which had just been given to him, that he did not even notice that the brown packet containing the Pensinger papers was gone; in fact, he had forgotten that it ever ex-

isted; but a week later, when he received word that his friend, Mr. Pensinger, had died suddenly, he recalled the papers and began to search for them, but they were never found."

"Oh, I know where they were," Lena May said brightly, "under the floor."

Bobs nodded, her eyes glowing. "That's just it!" she affirmed. "Recently Judge Caldwaller-Cory said to Ralph, 'Either we will have to tear down this old building of ours or we will have to renovate it and bring it up to date.'

"Ralph is romantic enough to want to retain the atmosphere of the days of his grandfather, and so he favored the latter plan. Soon carpenters were tearing up the office floors to replace them with hard wood and the packet was found."

"And in those papers, had Mr. Pensinger made some different disposition of his property?" Gloria inquired.

Bobs nodded. "Yes," she said. "It seems that Mr. Pensinger, after his wife's death, visited Hungary, found his daughter Marilyn, who lived but a short time, and so, as he was without an heir, he had written Mr. Caldwaller-Cory, requesting him to

use the Pensinger fortune wherever he thought it would be most needed."

"What will become of this house?" Lena May inquired.

"Ralph didn't say. He wants to tell that himself. In fact, he said that he was coming right up in The Whizz and that he wasn't coming alone, either."

"I suppose that Dick De Laney will be with him," Gloria remarked as she cleared the table.

"We aren't going to be kept long in suspense," Gwendolyn said, "for The Whizz just passed the window and there's the knocker. Shall I go to the door?"

Before her sisters could reply, that maiden was half-way down the long hall, and a second later she reappeared with Ralph at her side. Two other young men followed closely. One indeed was Dick De Laney and the other was Mr. Hardinian. His dark, expressive eyes showed that he was much mystified by all that was happening.

"Shall we go into the salon?" Gloria inquired when greetings were over.

"No indeed. This dining-room corner with its cheerful grate fire is the pleasantest part of the old

house," Ralph declared. "Dick, help me bring in another chair or two."

"Now sit down, everybody, and I'll tell you the results of my conference with my father." Ralph was plainly elated about something, which, as yet, he had revealed to no one.

When they were seated, he turned at once to the tall, dark Hungarian. "Mr. Hardinian, you were telling me last week that your temporary wooden building for the Boys' Club is to be torn down next month that a tobacco factory may be erected, were you not?"

"Yes," was the reply of the still puzzled young man. "I can't imagine where I am to take my boys. I don't like to have them bunkless even for one night."

"Of course not, nor shall they be," Ralph continued. Then he looked at the girls beamingly. "Not if these young ladies will consent to having a model clubhouse erected in the old garden back of their mansion."

"Ralph, how wonderful that would be!" Gloria exclaimed. "But what do you mean?"

"Just what I say," the lad replied. "The former owner of this place wanted his fortune used for

some good cause, and Dad and I thought that it would be great to help Mr. Hardinian carry on his fine work right here on this very spot as a sort of memorial, and couldn't it be called The Pensinger Boys' Club, or something like that?"

"Indeed it could," Mr. Hardinian's dark eyes expressed his appreciation more than words could have done. Then to the tall girl at his side he said: "Now, many of our dream-plans for the boys can be made a reality."

Turning to the others, he continued: "I am sure that Gloria is now willing that I should tell you that she had consented to some day mother all of our boys, and because of this splendid new plan, I hope that the some-day may be very soon."

And it was. Indeed, before another year had passed, each of the girls was in a home of her own.

THE END.